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Contents for October, 1926

Cover Design ..... **C. Barker Petrie, Jr.**
Illustrating a scene from "The Supreme Witch"

The Supreme Witch ..... **G. Appleby Terrill** **436**
There were terrors that Nora Shafto dreaded worse than death, but she had witch's craft enough to protect herself

The Voice of Bills ..... **John Martin Leahy** **449**
A rational ghost-story, which loses none of its thrill because the reader feels that it could have happened

The Throwback ..... **Orlin Frederick** **461**
A five-minute tale, about an atavism, a hark-back to primordial savage ancestors

The Great God Pan ..... **Seabury Quinn** **463**
Jules de Grandin throws a wrench into the schemes of the pagan high priest of a new kind of Pan-worship

(Continued on Next Page)

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(Continued from Preceding Page)

The Woman With the Crooked Nose ..... **Victor Rousseau** **473**
The second of a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls"

The Chair ..... **Marion Heidt Mimms** **481**
Alan Carvel restores a murderer to life, with consequences that were as terrible as they were unforeseen

The Corpus Delicti ..... **Eli Colter** **495**
Burgensdorf heard Hasting's boastful story—and then out of the clouds there flashed the wrath of the Almighty

Cattle of Furos ..... **Everil Worrell** **503**
Frank Alison pursues the green-faced man and the girl in red to the dark star—a sequel to "The Bird of Space"

Across Space (Part 2) ..... **Edmond Hamilton** **520**
A three-part weird-scientific serial—strange beings in Rano Kao volcano pull the planet Mars from its orbit

Weird Story Reprint
No. 16. The Bagman's Story ..... **Charles Dickens** **534**
The phantom might have been an old chair, but it brought happy consequences to the bagman

The Projection of Armand Dubois ..... **Henry S. Whitehead** **543**
A tale of voodoo in the Virgin Islands—a specter that threw vitriol—and a little goat that frightened Madame Du Chaillu

The Coffin of Lissa ..... **August W. Derleth** **551**
A short tale of the horrors of the Inquisition—a story of frightful tortures under a coffin-lid

Seven Minutes ..... **Frank Owen** **554**
The physician's wife lost her soul—so the physician crossed the borders of life in search of it

Fettered (Conclusion) ..... **Greye La Spina** **559**
Frightful doom menaced two men and two women in the northern woods—a novel of midnight horror

Grave Chains ..... **A. Leslie** **569**
Verse

The Phantom Express ..... **H. Thompson Rich** **570**
The ghost in this story was no ordinary specter—it was the ghost of an express train

The Eyrie **572**
A chat with the readers

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The SUPREME WITCH

by G. Appleby Terrill.

"I wrung out my sword, promising him every agony that man can inflict on man."

THE logs which had just been laid on the fire were wet, and as the powerful yellow flames wrapped them round, long, hissing spurts of steam broke the silence which was in the room.

At the table with its wine bottles, glasses, and candles four men sat—Jacobite conspirators; for they were met in the interests of the Stuart King in exile, James the Third—the Pretender, the government styled him. The four were: the parson, the messenger from King James, Mr. Gartshore the scrivener, and "Old Jem" Lambardiston, the lord of the manor.

Mr. Gartshore was pondering a question of finance, for an answer to which the others waited.

Eventually he spoke:

"Not much above five thousand pounds. Tell his Majesty five thousand guineas."

The messenger made a note; and this concluded the business of the evening. The parson's inclination now was to go. He was ill at ease sitting in Old Jem's house. Nothing short of the Stuart agent's presence in it would have enticed him over the threshold. For not only had he and Old Jem quarreled hotly in the very first hour of their acquaintance, some eighteen months before, rarely speaking since, but Old Jem was reputed to have been a thoroughly bad man all his days, and, in his eighty-seventh year, to be ever ready to gibe at good, to talk with satisfaction of his own misdeeds, and to approve those of others. The only spark in his soul which was not a gleam of evil ('twas commonly said) was a sincere wish that James III could be placed on the throne of his fathers.

So far, tonight, the affairs of the exile had fully occupied Old Jem. But, with the deliberations finished, it was not improbable that his tongue would turn in malice to themes and assertions which would sharply wound the parson. At least, thus the parson reasoned; and his ears were alert for an attack as he hesitated betwixt remaining and showing discourtesy to the company by taking his leave.

However, Old Jem tended to be silent. Sunken a little in his chair, he watched the messenger fold his papers. Anon he motioned him to fill his glass; and, draining his own, he blinked, and closed his eyes, breathing thickly.

The parson, though becoming drawn into converse with Mr. Gartshore, looked at his host. Strive as he would, he could feel no touch of that pity which the old so often stir in one, he could feel only detestation for the aged face in repose. Partly

encircled by a tumbled, very white peruke, and now colored high by wine, it was, for all its deep lines, fleshy still. The underlip, tinged with purple, hung loose, the mouth seeming to leer lazily; yet, because of the great puckers about it, 'twas no weak mouth, but ruthless, brow-beating.

"There is a lad in Parliament," said the messenger, buttoning his waistcoat over his papers, "a Mr. Faunce, that spoke cleverly on the witchcraft statutes. We should gain him to our side."

"I have seen to it," said the scrivener. He drank, and put down his glass slowly. "Witchcraft!" he exclaimed, a thrill of anger in his voice. "That is some credit to this year 1736, it hath witnessed the snuffing out of the witchcraft laws—and therefore of witchcraft. For the law, and the law only, made witchcraft . . . To think that in our day—twenty-five, twenty years back—the law of England was murdering women and little girls for witchcraft! . . . Mr. Parson, sir, I grant you there was witchcraft in Israel. But, declare to me, was there ever such in England?"

"Nay, there was not," answered the parson emphatically.

Old Jem's eyes opened. Faded and watery, they nevertheless bent on the parson a strong, unwavering gaze, and the limp underlip stiffened truculently.

"Take back your nay, parson," he said, "for I have been in witchcraft. Ay, I have been in it—head and shoulders in as great a piece of witchcraft as witch ever did—and the place of it no farther off than our town down yonder."

Over his face a shadow came—the kind of shadow that the parson would least have expected to find there. It hinted that once Old Jem had met with something which had appalled even his iron mind.

"In our town?" said the parson. "I have not heard——"

"Certes you have not. 'Twas away back in King Charles' time—nigh to three-score years ago. They who were in it with me are long since dead, and 'twas a thing we had no wish to talk of, and hoped we should forget." Old Jem shook his head, with his lips pursed and his eyes cloudy. "I have forgot no scrap, no jot."

"*Voilà*, then, Mr. Lambardiston," said the messenger, "give us the story."

"No," said Old Jem, taking up his snuffbox. "I would not have spoke this much, but the wiping out of the witch laws by these perky fellows who are too wise to believe in magic hath left me in a fume. And when Gartshore there, and Parson——"

He stopped, surveying the scrivener and parson in turn. "So ye deem it an empty tale, Gartshore, and you too, Parson?" For a few seconds his lips pressed together tightly, his face ever setting harder, decision growing in his eyes, which smoldered with exasperation. "Very well!" he cried; "ye shall have the tale; and if ye will go to the jail tomorrow ye shall find some records that will savor of its truth." He raised himself and leaned forward with his arms on the table.

The messenger breathed "Good!" Mr. Gartshore muttered something apologetic, and the parson's interest vanquished his inclination to go.

"Now listen," said Old Jem.

His voice was wonderfully powerful for his years; and he gave his narrative with an orderliness and ease that were to be anticipated from one who in the past had been reckoned one of the finest Tory orators in the House of Commons.

"To begin with," he said, "I must go back to the year '67—1667, when I was a lad of seventeen.

Witchcraft trials were frequent enough thenadays, as you do know; and at the autumn assize here we had the case of a woman who lived in this very town. Her name was Shafto—Ellen Shafto. She was a widow whose man had been killed in the great Four Days Fight with the Hollander fleet. She had two young children, a boy and a girl, and was of no ripe age herself, say, twenty-eight. And a pretty woman she was, dark-haired, slim, and smiling, with a sweet curve to the jaw and a taking poise of the head—as I had begun to note. But, despite her prettiness and her poverty, she was known as a very honest woman. Having been, ere she came hither, needle-maid to some modish madame, she kept herself and her children by sewing for the gentlefolk roundabout here.

"Now there was another woman—I forget how called—who was her neighbor and did work of a like kind; and betwixt her and Mrs. Shafto jealousy and quarreling arose.

"After a while it chanced that this woman's right hand and arm became swelled, so that she was sorely pained and could not sew. Old Dr. Peters, the leech, could in no wise get rid of the swelling and was puzzled to discover a cause for it.

"A bruit spread that Mrs. Shafto had bewitched the arm, accomplishing this by standing at her window with a silk kirtle across her own arm and her eyes held on the other woman's house. At her trial, under threat of torture, Mrs. Shafto pleaded guilty and was sentenced to be hanged.

"Now mark this well. She was to be hanged in the market-place, opposite the 'Red Bull' inn. On the morning a great and savage crowd was gathered there, groaning and yelling and bent to seize her ere she reached the gallows-tree and to give her a rougher death than by the rope. For witchcraft is a crime that oft will drive a populace to a frenzy.

"I was looking on from the 'Red Bull,' ill enough pleased by the scene—being young, and the witch so comely; and close on 9 o'clock, the hour for the hanging, everything appeared the horrider to me because of the strange quality of the daylight. It was November—for the assize had come late. The sun was but little risen, and shone weakly through a gap it had melted in the thick murk which floated over us. The market-place was partly shadows and partly a blotch of queer, heavy, yellow light, wherein the faces of those who tiptoed to see if Mrs. Shafto were near—faces with teeth showing and eyes wide open—had the look of waxen masks.

"Of a sudden the bell in the clock-house commenced to ring nine. The multitude was stricken silent on the instant. All were bewildered because Mrs. Shafto was not come. But presently we caught the sound of a huge, angry cry from near the jail. And soon it was known that the sheriff, aware of what the mob intended, had called Ralph Timmins, the hangman, to him and bidden him hang Mrs. Shafto privily, which he did forthwith in her cell, putting the rope over a beam.

"My father, who was in the jail with the sheriff, told me afterwards that neither the sheriff nor he went to see the execution done. They stood with divers others in the passage by the main door, it being well-nigh dark save where a flood of the dull, yellow light fell, this coming to them through the window of a room whereof the door, opening upon the passage, was swung wide back.

"And anon, my father said, Ralph Timmins walked down the stone stairs to them, and was near to falling at the last step on account of the gloom; and saluting the sheriff, he quoth: 'Sir, I have put the young

witch away, as your worship bid.' "

Old Jem stopped to pour some wine. Presently the scrivener asked:

"And the woman's arm?"

"Mended from that day," said Old Jem. "Oh, Ellen Shafto was a witch, doubt it not; and maybe her power was far vaster than she showed. But she is not the witch of my tale—the supreme witch that was more potent than a score of Ellens.

"Now harken again:

"It was, I said, in '67 that Ellen Shafto was hanged. For the next twelve years I came but little to these parts, but, my father dying in '79, I removed hither from London.

"In a short while I learned that Ellen Shafto's children, the lad now aged twenty-one and the girl eighteen, still dwelt near the town; and one day I met this girl in the street. I knew her as soon as I saw her, for she woke my recollection of her mother. She was younger, fresher, even slighter, but she had the same dark curls, the same sweet curve of the jaw, the same alluring poise of the head. Only in the expression of her face did she differ much. The mother was wont to be smiling, the daughter's lips pouted (though in a pretty fashion) and her eyebrows, with the line of a little frown between them, warned one of a temper.

"I stopped her, asking her name—which she told me was Nora—and inquiring how she and her brother lived.

"Shyly, but giving me no further curtsy than that with which she had halted, she said that her brother had received a gift of money from the lady in London in whose service their mother had been. With this money he had leased a trifle of land, which he farmed, and she dwelt with him.

"I spoke with her for several minutes, and had meant to drop a couple of guineas into her palm; but I noted a stormy sparkle in her eyes when the coins clinked in my pocket, so I let them fall back; and I lifted not my fingers to her chin as I turned away—from memory of that stormy sparkle.

"But there and then I was mightily in love with Nora Shafto; and I knew that the winning of her was now to be the aim of my life, and that she would fight me hard."

Old Jem's eyes, which seemed growing dimmer and dimmer as he lost himself more surely in the past, half lit for a moment and swept to the parson—who discovered straightway, to the discomfiture of his conscience, that in one thing at least he had estimated Old Jem unjustly.

"I ask your pardon, Parson," quoth Old Jem, "for what I shall say next. But to give you a full understanding of my story I must speak plainly."

His eyes moved from the parson.

"As I said, I was mightily in love with Nora Shafto. I had no thought to marry her—though when 'twas too late I would have wed her a dozen times over if that could have brought her to me . . . That she was a witch's daughter, and might be a witch herself, was naught to me. I was the sort of man who would have enjoyed to wed a witch for the fun of it—were she a witch of birth. But I was not the sort of man to wed a needlewoman's daughter—were she white-souled as an angel.

"And certes, Nora Shafto was that, so far as accepting my love was concerned. She *could* have loved me. For a brief while, during which she let me speak often with her, I saw her affection for me grow—grow radiant—burn forth. But that was before she knew I meant not marriage. Afterwards—for months afterwards, I followed her, waylaid her, besought her, vainly. The flame which had burned was dead. I offered her what she would—gems by the handful, gold and more gold, till she had the chance

to beggar me well-nigh! She answered nay to all; not even a kiss did I get from her save a flick of a one which I snatched.

"That was by the horse-pool below the town, of an evening in the May of '80. I had intercepted my young paragon, and most lovely was she to see, a-stand with her head thrown back and her color bright, holding me at a distance with her look. The frowning line was plain betwixt her eyebrows, her eyes were all anger, and there were revealed—one near each nostril—two little stern furrows which somehow made her face appear old without taking away its youthfulness—a strange blending that was hauntingly beautiful.

"But of late her tongue and manner had so scathed me that I could keep my temper only by the hardest effort. And this evening, being presently jabbed by a retort from her, I exclaimed:

"'Nora, verily you are a little spite! You answer nothing but bitterness and spite to all I say, and I have never spoke a word to you that was not love and gentleness—till now.'

"She was in no way disconcerted by my new tone. She seemed rather to feel braced and of better self-assurance by reason of it. There was less anger in her face, and a good deal more of bold contempt, which is a thing to make one seethe, coming from a person of low birth.

"'Ay, you were very gentle, Mr. Lambardiston—thinking to fill my ears with toys,' said she, using a common phrase of the time. 'Farthing toys,' she added, her eyes most scornful.

"'Farthing toys is a lie,' I said. 'And that you know well.' I strove to master myself. 'Nora, I promised—I promise, to put round your fingers, round your neck, round your pretty curls, toys worth the ransom of this town . . . You will do all the gaining, I shall do all the spending——'

"She moved her shoulders quickly, lifting her chin higher and looking deliberately away from me.

"'Ay, that's your sleek prating,' she said in a slow, loathing way, '—you will do all the spending! . . . And you blamed me for a liar! *You—that will do all the spending!* . . . Oh!' cried she, looking back to me—and I saw in her eyes that she hated me—'Oh, why doth it not choke you—that damned lie? *You* will spend some bits of gold, but *I—I* must spend my soul—my soul! . . . Mr. Lambardiston whines to me to buy him a little diversion—*with my soul.* "Let us two voyage through loveland," quoth he. And *I* am to pay for his voyage—*with my soul!* Faugh! you blackguard cur!'

"Nora Shafto was ready with words, and her voice was of a better-bred quality than fitted her station—for after her mother's hanging a lady of the district had taken her into her house and cared for her well until her own death. But this denouncement had more barbed wit than anything she had given me yet—and it smarted me mightily; though I covered this with a laugh, deeming that a kiss would be ample amends for the invective, and determining that this instant I would take it.

"There was a horseman riding slowly up the lane towards us, but I cared not for him, and stepped across to Nora with a word of my intent. I noted that, instead of seeking to dart aside, she put her hand to the basket of flower roots, dug from the hedge, which she was carrying; and then my hands clapped on her shoulders and my lips touched a corner of her mouth as she jerked it past me.

"She stamped swiftly on my foot—I wore but shoes—threw off one of my hands, whirled, and got free, the basket dropping to the ground and

emptying forth its plants. From amid these she whipped up a dull, stout knife.

"'So that is Mr. Lambardiston!' she gasped. 'Mr. Lambardiston—of the great gentry that visit the law on poor folk . . . Mr. Lambardiston, that was made deputy sheriff a se'nnight since. An attacker of maids!' She showed me the knife. 'I want you to try again,' she said; 'for yonder comes a gentleman that shall swear I killed you fairly.'

"I had a good mind to try again. But the fellow on horseback had flipped up his nag, and was trotting forward all a-grin; and I had no sword with which to stay him from interference, whereas a very long iron was jogging by his leg. Withal, as Nora had fleered, I was deputy sheriff, and could not but cut an unseemly figure in the affair, which, by an argument with the arriving knave, might be much noised.

"So I turned from her, limping with my hurt foot.

"'You witch's jade!' I said; 'you have the black temper of a witch yourself.'

"I heard her draw in her breath at that. I heard her move, as though she meditated to cast herself on my back. But then she spoke mockingly:

"'I knew it!' cried she. 'I knew your brute's mouth would go to my poor mother . . . Oh, ay, I have a witch's temper, Mr. Lambardiston, and witch's craft enough to keep myself out of your hands however you strive.'

"At this last idle saying—as I deemed it—I faced about for a moment and quietly bade her cease from dangerous words of witchcraft. For though I never would have repeated them to her harm, the horseman was now within earshot.

"Having given which warning, I went home.

"Two days afterwards her brother, Francis Shafto, a big, dour-visaged fellow, placed himself surlily, with extreme impudence, in my path as I was entering the town. He threatened that if I so much as spoke to Nora henceforth, he would so beat me with his cudgel that I should lie abed for many a week; and he added 'twas his belief no magistrate or judge would do other than hold him justified in this.

"It was plain that I must have him cleared out of the place. I wrote that same day to a friend, captain of a second-rate of the navy; and a week after this, half a dozen sailors went to Shafto's farm and impressed Master Francis for the sea—most lawlessly, I confess.

"Hearing that he was taken off, with Nora left swooning from the fury with which she had struggled to tear him from the sailors, I felt I had done cleverly. His release would be an additional bribe to offer Nora . . .

"I had not done cleverly; I had done fatally.

"THE first hint I got of the truth was a report that the seamen, on their road to the coast with Francis Shafto, had been charged into by a vicious bull. Then followed the news that no bull had attacked them, but a black filly, which, bursting suddenly through a gate, had raced straightway upon them and, biting, lashing, trampling, like a fiend, had badly torn one man, broken the leg of another, and killed a third outright. Francis Shafto, whose hands were tied because of a fight he had made at the farm, was the first to be knocked down, but was not harmed by the beast, which presently, setting her teeth in his coat, began to drag him away; but a sailor, who by now had drawn his whinger, struck her on the shoulder, whereat she dropped Shafto and clattered off fast.

"I was starting forth for London when I had these tidings. Beyond being somewhat pleased that Shafto

was unhurt, I was little interested. But, returning hither a few days later to renew matters with Nora, I was prettily astounded to find that she was in jail, accused of having changed herself into the black filly and slain a sailor with the hope to rescue her brother.

"I will tell you what was evidenced against her. The filly, when driven off by the blow from the whinger, was seen again by no man, nor was anyone in the countryside to be found who owned her or remembered to have seen her. At the time of the onset Nora was a day gone from home, having told her friends that she would privily follow the press-party and, it might be, persuade some folk to attack it for her. She came back on the day after the filly's attack. She was very wearied and draggled and white, *and in great pain from a cut across her shoulder*, which had been done, she said, by striking against a fence in the dark.

"Now the tale of the filly and the whinger was reached here before her; and, everyone knowing of her mother, tongues were already a-wag. It needed but the cut on Nora's shoulder to set the town mad with excitement. Never had there been so clear a case of a child inheriting evil magic! And the strength of this magic in Nora! She was a far more dangerous witch than ever her mother was. The magistrates were clamored at to commit her to prison, and this was done ere she had been home many hours—a crowd lingering about the jail till nearly midnight, roaring and threatening to break in to her, and everyone saying that no man could account himself at all safe while she were alive.

"I knew not whether to believe Nora a witch or to flout the notion, but I did know one thing—she should be neither hanged nor harmed, if my influence could shield her; and I was very certain it could.

"Forthwith, using my sheriff powers, I proclaimed penalties against any that should make a turmoil outside the jail; and I called out and stationed therein a score of train-bandmen, armed to the eyelids. I used the rough of my tongue to the magistrates who had caused the arrest and detention of Nora, instead of flogging the mob that had clamored against her.

"And then I went to Nora.

"My purpose was to dispel her fears at once, to tell her that I would see she was not put on trial at the assize, that indeed I would get her freed ere the week was out. And as I strode with the chief turnkey to her cell I was sure she would read much of this in my face, and, in her relief and gratitude, give me a kinder welcome than of late.

"When the fellow had unbarred the door, I bade him begone to a distance, and, swinging back the door myself, I entered the cell.

"Nora greeted me with a gasp of her breath, with stormshine in her eyes. Despite that I came to a standstill, she moved, facing me, to the far wall. Leaning against it, with her head held back and touching it, she commenced to rage at me, her voice low for the most part, yet often thrown hither and thither by her passion—the palms of her hands now and again beating upon the wall.

"What need to tell you her speech? 'Twas the old tale of hate over again, yet now twice as bitter, with its accusation that I had planned her brother's carrying-off, whereby I was responsible for the pass she was come to.

"For a space she would heed no word of mine. But anon she began to listen to my protest that I would avert all peril from her—obtain her quick release. While harkening, she seemed to cool fast from her rage, her palms lying quite still against the wall, her eyes lacking luster. Her

face had become wooden, as the saying is. This I little liked.

" 'For your favor,' she said, on my pausing, 'I am to love you? Is that the compact?'

" 'Scarce a compact,' I answered. 'I am not so mean a man I will not save you unless you shall love me . . . No, no, Nora; yet I shall hope you will change to me; and mark you this —if you do, your brother shall swiftly be libertied from the navy.'

" 'Ah-h,' she said softly, a dreaminess in her eyes—eyes that were much my study when I was with her; they were so fluent of expression, so beautiful. 'Ah-h,' she said; 'in truth—in truth, there is no villain worse than you in all this villain world! For see, you are high-placed, with my poor life and my brother's much in your power; wherefore you should be of stern honor, Mr. Lambardiston—should you not?—that we and such as we could ever trust you . . . But what are you!' She breathed between her set teeth with a hissing sound. 'If my mother's spirit is here beside me,' she said, 'of which I am very sure, what must she think of you? Have you no whit of shame, striving to break me in the room where my mother doubtless stands?'

" 'Why doubtless here?' I asked.

"She looked upwards. Following her glance, I saw above us a balk of dark oak spanning the cell. I exclaimed loudly; for I was moved by the cruel thoughtlessness which had caused Nora to be placed in the very room in which her mother was hanged.

" 'You shall be taken out of this,' I said, making a step to summon the turnkey.

"But, far from thanking me, she brought me to a halt by declaring she would liefer remain, and would entreat Mr. Palmer, the governor of the jail, to put her back in this cell, did I have her removed.

"The dreaminess had gone from her eyes, but for some seconds it came again. I could not tell whether she spoke chiefly to me or to herself when she said:

" 'I do remember my mother very well, though I had her for so little a time. She was a dear, sweet mother, and I know doth yearn to hearten me now that I am accused as she was . . . I think I am more near to her in this room than I could be elsewhere on earth.' Her voice sank, becoming a moan, soft—scarce unhappy. 'I have wanted my mother. None knows how much! She was all tender love, and the world is loneliness and cruel as stone. I shall be glad to go away to my mother, though I would it were not by the hangman.'

"Then her eyes, meeting mine squarely, lit of a sudden. There was a quick rousing of her mind and body. She started from the wall and bent towards me. 'But rather would I go by hanging, rather by the roasting-post, than come to you—you sneaking dog! Ay, an hundred times rather!'

"It was clear she could not be reasoned with that day. I turned on my heel, wasting no more words; and, walking from the jail, I decided that my best plan would be to seem to abandon her until she had been put in greater fright than she was in at present. I would let her stand her trial, which I doubted not would result in her condemnation; and then I would secure a pardon."

Old Jem sipped from his glass. Setting it down, he relapsed in his chair, and clasped his hands, without having looked at any of his auditors. His gaze brooded darkly on the wall opposite him.

"She was tried at the summer assize. She pleaded 'not guilty,' and was not threatened with torture to make her alter that. For the judge was old Jack Phillips, no firm believer in witchcraft—as his words to the jury showed. But the jury took

only a few minutes to find her guilty; and she was condemned to be hanged in the market-place, where her mother was to have been flung off.

"Already I had arranged almost fully about getting the pardon; and after the case Jack Phillips threw in his weight with me; and I had the pardon in my hands with forty hours to spare. But I meant to bring Nora fairly to the ground, with no fight left in her, this time. I had charge of the execution—Holden, the sheriff, being bedridden—and I intended to say naught of the pardon until my pretty one was within a few minutes of being carted forth to the gibbet, and the uproar of the mob, sounding from the market-place, should tell her that, outside the prison, she would have no safety, despite her pardon, except she drove forth with me and my train-bandmen and lodged in my house.

"I would forbid any sheltering of her in the jail. And by a gift of drink to the mob I should have inflamed it to an extraordinary ferocity, such as, in her stubbornest hate of me, she could not dream to face. Oh, I had Miss Nora in a rare trap from which there was no escape but into my doorway.

"With her pardon under my pillow, I slept complacent of mind through the night which she would deem to be her last.

"I STARTED early for the jail in the morning—the clearest, sweetest July morning I had ever known, with the hills beyond the woods wondrous outstanding and gleaming in the sunlight. I went afoot to enjoy the air, having ordered my coach to be at the jail for my return with Nora.

"Her hanging was to be at 9, opposite the 'Red Bull.' Passing behind the market-place, I felt the air a-tremble from the vast confusion of voices coming thence; and at intervals these uplifted in a shout of execration against her that nigh stunned one—which noise reaching me as I paused before the jail to warn a group of persons that I should permit no gathering there, was like the tumbling down of thousands of planks of wood.

"I smiled to think what a tempest would burst when the news of the pardon spread (I had increased my train-bandmen to fifty), and to think what indignation would be shown by sundry gentlemen who were to meet me in the jail—when it was disclosed to them that the pardon (which they would have expected instant tidings of) was by no means newly arrived. These same gentlemen—Palmer, the governor, Captain Jones and Sir Hugh Gerrow, justices—were prone to take offense at my high-handed acts, as they termed them.

"However, I saw not how the latter two received the tidings; for about half after 8, they being not yet come, I informed Palmer, bidding him tell them, and went up to Nora's cell. On my way I met Ralph Timmins, the hangman, who had put her mother to death by means of the beam in the cell. He was an oldish man now, with his shoulders much bent and his thin beard streaked white and brown.

"'There be a riot of howling in the market-square, your worship,' said he. ''Tis as it was in her mother's time, or worse, I'd affirm.' He rubbed his chin with his knuckles. 'A queer, sad business, sir—these two. Both so pretty to look on and like as a pair o' pink roses.'

"'You will have no hanging today, Ralph,' I answered; 'she is pardoned. But you shall nothing lose in fees.' Unwilling to stay even long enough to get out some gold for him, because of my eagerness to greet Nora, I added: 'Wait for me below.'

"The door of Nora's cell was open, two turnkeys standing by the threshold. I gestured them away and

walked in. I could perceive that Nora had gone white at the sound of my approach. Perchance she knew not my step—thought one was come to take her to the cart. When I confronted her the color began to come again to her cheeks; and the line of the little frown between her eyebrows was deeper than I had ever discerned it. She held herself rigid, the fingers of one hand gripping motionlessly a cluster of her dark curls.

"Well, I showed her the pardon. I lifted my finger, telling her to listen to the outcry in the market-place, which was borne to us; and I explained to her that only by taking refuge in my house could she preserve herself from the savage anger of the town. Not until that last did her face lose its stoniness, did her eyes cease from looking balefully into mine.

"She raised them towards the beam; her fingers twitched amid her curls. 'Oh, my mother—mother! mother!' she said, her lips so quivering that I believed she would fall to sobbing.

" 'Now, come at once with me, Nora', I said gently.

"She gave but one sob, a strange, sighing one, and her gaze returned to me.

" 'What if I ask Mr. Palmer to harbor me here?'

" 'I will not allow him.'

" 'I had wagered that—bully of every man!' Then she spoke with greater steadiness. 'You believe you are the winner betwixt us, but I believe I quoth true when I said I had witch's craft enough to keep myself out of your hands.'

" 'Come,' I said.

"She took her fingers from her curls and pointed to the pardon. 'Until that is given to Mr. Palmer, his warranty to release me, you can not force me to stir, or force any man to stir me, bully whom you shall. And I will not stir except Mr. Palmer comes hither to bid me, or Mr. Drew doth bid me.'

"Drew was the chief turnkey, one of the two who had been conversing with her. He had been present at her mother's death, and—I suspected—had been pitying to the daughter.

"Frail though Nora's argument was, I made no dispute. I should get her more quickly to my coach by bending to her whim. I started immediately to go down to Palmer, beckoning to Drew to accompany me, so that Palmer could send him back for Nora. Then it came to my mind that her boast anent witch's craft might have some subtle meaning. What if she were planning to kill herself! At once I swung round and went to the entrance of the cell, whither the second turnkey was advancing. Nora stood much as I had left her.

"I intercepted the turnkey, whispered that he should watch her narrowly. Then, giving one more glance at the sweetly molded face and the eyes balefully following me, I rejoined Drew.

"I found Palmer and Jones and Sir Hugh Gerrow standing in a passage within the main door, with Ralph Timmins a yard or two from them waiting expectantly for me. Within a minute Palmer had dispatched Drew to bring Nora to us, and then I had leisure to note that Jones and Gerrow were even more cholerically silent than I had anticipated. I surmised that they had been examining my motive in taking Nora to my house.

"I let them have my back, and gazed along the passage to the stone stairs, looking for Nora to appear round the bend of them. Anon I recollected Ralph Timmins and gave him three guineas, which moved him to very many thanks. These, however, I scarce heeded, for I was watching the stairs again, exasperation growing in me as I realized that Nora was contriving somehow a long delay.

" 'Palmer,' I said presently, 'that girl is making a to-do of sorts—the little ingrate! I beg you go yourself and fetch her.'

"I heard him take a step behind me. But then he spoke to Timmins:

" 'Ralph, go you and tell Drew to hasten with her.'

" 'Ay, go, Ralph,' I said.

"Timmins mounted the stairs at his sharpest pace. My three guineas were spurring him. Yet when full time enough was passed for him to have reached Drew and one of them be back with Nora, no one came.

" 'They are seeking her hood or dusting her kirtle, or more like she is swooned with happiness,' said Jones, on Palmer himself remarking that Ralph was somewhat long gone.

" 'Nay, tell the truth as it is,' said Gerrow. 'The maid is not over-raptured with Lambardiston . . . And, deuce take me!' he added, with his spleen coming to the surface; 'I can not tell why we stay to see the meeting of the child and the gentleman.'

"There was a considerable sneer about the last word which whipped my attention pretty smartly from the stairs. I faced round, and was on the point of retorting hotly, when I was diverted by the casting open of a door beside us. Three of my trainbandmen stepped forth from a room. They saluted us, and two of them marched off. The third, a sergeant, paused to shut the door.

" 'Nay, leave it,' said Jones. 'We get some daylight thus . . . Faith!' he continued, as the sergeant went away; 'how queerly dark it hath grown in this last minute. A storm is on us.'

" ''Tis the suddenest thing,' said Gerrow with astonishment. He lifted his cane towards the barred aperture above the main door. 'Not a minute ago the sky yonder was fresh blue, Palmer; I was looking at it. See it now, the smokiest brown I ever beheld'— he broke off with an extraordinary gulp, flicking down his cane and jabbing the end hard upon the paved floor—'I—ever—beheld' — he repeated, sheer amazement in his voice—'*save once*, a wintry morning nigh thirteen years ago, when I stood in this very passage, and Ralph Timmins was gone up to hang this girl's mother—*this girl's mother!* . . Jones, Palmer, do you mark the marvel of it? Here I stood, with Amphlett, the sheriff, and with Harry Lambardiston—Lambardiston's father. And up above there was death for a witch, as there was near to have been for her daughter in this hour—and that up above too, for there would have been dangerous trouble in the market-place had she gone thither. List, you can hear the tumult from it. So we heard it then—and through this doorway——'

"Gerrow moved athwart the room's doorway, and instantly his spare, elderly face was illumined by a sickly, yellow light, which showed him staring with something akin to fear, with his lips working.

" 'Yea, there it is!' he cried, pointing shakily through the doorway. 'There is the self-same sky that was over us.'

"Now, having been preoccupied by Nora's tardiness, I had not noticed the change to gloom until Jones' speaking of it. In my surprize at perceiving how deep an obscurity was about us, save in the yellow light's path, I straightway forgot my anger against Gerrow; and, listening while he spoke of that other morning, I found myself remembering much that my father had said anent their standing in this passage. And when the dull, yellow glow swam over Gerrow's face I recalled vividly indeed how my father had spoken of the yellow light pouring through this very doorway—and in an instant, for no reason that I knew of, I felt my heart cold and heavy.

"I went to Gerrow's side and

glanced through the doorway to the window beyond; and at that verily I got a shock. The sky was the sky of the morning when Mrs. Shafto was hanged. *It was that same November sky*—not a similitude made by the overcasting of the July sky. For the sun, seemingly, had fallen back from the height whence it shone as I walked to the jail, and was little risen; and it shone feebly through a gap molten in the thick murk—just as it had when I looked on it from the 'Red Bull' in my boyhood. Its turbid light then had rendered Mrs. Shafto's coming death increasedly dreadful to me; but now, ere I had gazed on it five seconds, there slid over me a horror—on this morning when no execution was to be done!—a hundredfold worse than that which qualmed me when execution really was to be.

"'Gerrow!' I breathed; and I looked at him.

"He was gripping his chin tightly. His eyes were expanding, vacant. His mien was that of one dismayed to stupefaction by something he has discovered.

"''Tis thirteen years ago,' he said, slurredly, for his grip was hampering his mouth. 'This day is thirteen years ago—we are in November, '67 . . . . How can it be?'

"'Gerrow!' I cried.

"His vacant eyes sought me. A startled glitter sprang up in them. He gaped, taking his hand from his chin and holding it, limp-fingered, towards me.

"'Lambardiston,' he said, 'how like to your father you are! Why—why *you are* he! Harry—Harry Lambardiston, old friend!'

"His hand dropped in affection on my shoulder. I clasped his arm to push it away, but I heard Jones speak to Palmer, and his words arrested me in the act.

"'Palmer,' he quoth heavily, 'my dear cousin, Ned Olpherts, is dead at last of the wounds the French gave him at Martinique.'

"Well did I know that Jones' cousin, Olpherts, lingering with wounds received when fighting under Admiral Harman at Martinique, had died in November, '67.

"Palmer replied not, except to mumble of the fort at Tangier, and of the Moormen—seeming to believe himself in Africa, where once he had served.

"And then from the clock-house began to ring forth the hour of 9.

"I clutched hard on Gerrow's arm; for, though the sounds were not very near us, each stroke seemed to club my senses; and, what with the horrid yellow light, I was become giddy—helplessly giddy. And bemused too was I, in the strangest fashion, during a space. For, having reeled against a wall, pulling Gerrow with me, I leaned there thinking that my weakness and unaccountable dread were disgraceful to me who had gained such a repute for stout courage at the fight on Long Marston Moor; and full a minute must have passed ere I remembered that it was my father who fought at Long Marston—six years before I was born.

"I thrust Gerrow's arm from me. Still leaning, I noted that the others stood very quiet, their faces set in a wholly bewildered expression, yet their eyes restless, in a lethargic manner, dwelling now on mine, now on each other's.

"For a space we stayed thus without a word; each man, I should say, striving to adjust the disorder which he knew his thoughts were in, and wondering if all were as distraught as he.

"Then we were aroused—even as I perceived that the yellowness was going from the light and the passage brightening somewhat—by a footfall on the stone stairs.

"Ralph Timmins was descending alone. He came from step to step slowly, and despite the gloom that remained, and his distance from me, I saw that there was yet in his face a far greater confusion than had ever been in my companions. Confusion! —it was the completest astoundment. Save that his pale blue eyes were wide open, as though from some waxing torment of his mind, he was in a stupor. He seemed a man midway between a dream that was terrible and an awakening that was more terrible. Above his streaked beard his cheeks were marble-white.

"Slowly he moved down. At the last step he tripped, nearly pitching on his head.

"It was then that Gerrow's voice rose in a very wail. 'Oh, see that!' he cried. 'What means it? What witch's craft is on us!'

"I had seen, with my father's saying of how Ralph Timmins had stumbled at the bottom step darting like a sword blade through my brain. That stumble, and Gerrow's final words, discovered the truth to me.

"*I knew—ay, I knew what* Timmins, coming drag-foot straight to me with his eyes now on my face, desperately questioning me, was going to say.

"*I knew!* My poor, wondrous little Nora, who deemed she had witch's craft enough to keep herself from me! How supremely had she wrought with her magic!

"Timmins stopped, and saluted me.

" 'Sir,' he said, 'I have put the young witch away, as your worship bid.'

"Knowing, I had waited petrified. But his words stung me to life—to madness. I shrieked twice or thrice, making the passage echo—Timmins crouching and wilting before me. With both hands I seized his neckcloth, tearing it off him as I strove to smash him against the wall. I struck him on the face. I wrung out my sword, cursing him, promising him every agony that man can inflict on man. Then—I can not tell why, save that I was bereft of reason—I shouted:

" 'Bring her! Go, bring her down to me!'—menacing him with my point.

"He moved his hands hopelessly.

" 'Your worship, she is dead.'

" 'Bring her!' I screamed.

"He turned and went to the stairs. He mounted and was gone behind their bend; and once more I was watching those empty stone stairs. I felt a hand patting my arm. 'Twas Jones; for Gerrow, some way behind me, was saying: 'Look, blue sky and clear sunlight! . . . Man, open that door, I am nigh swooning.' And the main door grated open, which would be done by Palmer's hand.

"I took not my eyes from the stairs. I listened strainedly; and at last the sound of slow steps, the steps of someone descending sideways with a burden, came to me from beyond the bend. And then appeared Nora's little feet in their gray hose—extended in the air, the shoon fallen off. I saw her kirtle edge; I saw her knees, swathed in her kirtle, half arched upon Timmins' arm. In another second I should have seen her face. But I could not endure that much. I leapt round with fresh and frantic screams and ran out to my coach."

Old Jem put his hand over his eyes, remaining very still for a while.

"After the rain yesterday," he said, his voice gone wan and low, "I went walking, and came home by the horse-pool. I halted in the lane, thinking much on Nora. This is December month, but 'twas May to me in the lane; and how clear I could see Nora with her sweet, angered face, her poor little basket of flower roots —and her old knife, which I would, with all my heart! she had drove

(Continued on page 575)

The VOICE of BILLS

By John Martin Leahy

"And then suddenly the doomed man had sprung. Slickmer fired again, and yet again."

"I AM safe! Safe!" he repeated. "Nobody knows that Bills was here. Nothing went wrong. Not a sign, not a clue remains. Ha, ha! Why don't these crime bunglers do things like me?"

The day had been bright and sunny, but, as the man, a mattock and a shovel on his shoulder, issued from the shadows of the dense spruce forest, the sun slipped behind heavy clouds and the wilderness landscape suddenly turned dark and sinister.

But Slickmer did not notice this. For him, the sun still rode high and bright in the sky. His heart was glad; his soul sang and shouted for very joy. For it was done. Yes, at last, after all his dreaming, all his planning and scheming, the deed was done. At last he had killed Bills, as years before he had sworn he would some day do. And not a sign, not the faintest clue remained. Oh, he had seen to that! The deed was a thing to be proud of.

He could have killed Bills long, long ago—only he would take no chances. There must be no mistake, nothing to raise a finger of suspicion against him. No bungler, he!

It had taken a long time, but this day had seen it done. No one knew that Bills had come to this lonely cabin far up on the middle fork of the Snoqualmie. Oh, he, Slickmer, had been very careful as to that! No one ever would know of what had happened there in the depths of the dark spruce forest; no one ever would know that in a certain spot where long damp mosses grew and vine-maples made a tangle roundabout—no one ever would dream that in that spot a man had been done to death and buried there beneath the long green mosses.

For how could anyone ever know? Not a clue remained. These bunglers in crime! The poor boobs, why didn't they do it as carefully as he had done?

He stopped there in the field, and, while the surrounding forest grew more somber and forbidding of aspect, and the clouds massed thicker and blacker overhead, he went over every action of his that had led up to the crime.

The man laughed suddenly aloud. Safe? His plan had worked without a single hitch. There was nothing for the sharpest-eyed Sherlock Holmes of them all to see.

Then he studied with his mind's eye the crime itself. Safe? Yes, those bunglers should be as crafty and careful as himself. Nothing had been forgotten. How cool he had been all the time! He had overlooked nothing. Nothing had gone amiss. Not a single clue remained. Only the dark trees had seen; and trees, like dead men, could tell no tales.

Slickmer chuckled to himself as he saw again, as vivid as he had seen it in the flesh, that sudden puzzled look on Bills' face when, on their breaking from the tangle of vine-maple and stepping out into that little mossy spot, he, Slickmer, had said: "Well, Bills, this is the place. Not a bad one to spend eternity in, eh?".

Bills had eyed him keenly, questioningly, for a few moments, then Bills had said: "Slickmer, what do you mean? That look of yours——"

Bills had not been able to finish that.

"I mean, Bills, that you had better say your prayers and prepare to go on a long journey. You'll never leave this spot alive—or dead either, for I am going to bury you here, Bills. It's nice and cool here, which will be a good thing to remember—for you are going to be hot enough. Yes, it is nice and cool, Bills. See how the water drips from the moss at times."

"My God, man!" Bills had exclaimed. "Surely you can't mean this, Slickmer!"

"I am not joking, Bills. I have been waiting for this moment for years, planning it, dreaming about it waking and sleeping.".

At this point Slickmer had drawn his big blue revolver from his pocket.

"I have waited long, Bills, for I wasn't going to take any chance. I wasn't going to be caught, for then all my vengeance would be wormwood and gall. See how cool I am! That is because I have planned it all out so carefully, and it all is going as I planned it. I have waited long, Bills, but I ain't going to lose no time now that I have you here."

How Bills had pleaded! How Bills had tried to explain!

"My God, Slickmer, I didn't know you believed this. I knew that you hated me, that there had been misunderstandings. But I never dreamed that you had got things twisted in this hellish fashion. If I had done *it*, Slickmer, God knows I couldn't blame you for this thing you are going to do. But, as there is a heaven above us, Slickmer, I am innocent!"

"That's what they all say," had been Slickmer's answer. "I am going to give you just four minutes, Bills," he had added, glancing at his watch.

"My God, Slickmer! I tell you that I am innocent! I tell you——"

But he had cut Bills short. This had been the only thing in all the terrible scene that had threatened Slickmer's sang-froid—this impassioned protestation of innocence on Bills' part.

After that Bills had stood very straight and very silent for some moments.

Then: "You may kill the flesh, Slickmer, you may splatter this green

moss with my brains; but you can't kill the soul."

Slickmer's only answer to this had been a smile.

"You believe, Slickmer, that dead men yet live?"

"Of course. But dead men never can touch the living. Else there would be no crime here on earth. But this that I am about to do is not a crime. You know that, Bills. It is vengeance."

"'Vengeance is mine,' saith the Lord."

"And mine," Slickmer had answered.

"So be it then," Bills had said quietly. "You may kill me and bury me here, but my spirit will be with you."

He, Slickmer, had laughed at this. Foolish Bills—trying to save himself with spooky threats!

"I'll be with you, Slickmer," Bills had continued. "You'll hear from me, and when you are least expecting it. You'll hear my voice in the night—perhaps when the wind whispers and moans. I'll dog your footsteps when the moon shines and sends long shadows. Before I am done with you, Slickmer, you will pray God on your knees to bury your bones here beneath mine!"

"You have just two minutes left, Bills," had been Slickmer's imperturbable answer.

A pallor had touched Bills' face, but other sign of fear he had given none. Yes, Bills had been a brave man. He, Slickmer, had to say that much for Bills.

And then suddenly the doomed man had sprung. Ah, crafty Bills! He had thought, because at that moment Slickmer's eyes had been on the watch, that Slickmer would not see.

The next instant Bills had pitched to the ground with a bullet through his lungs. Slickmer had fired again and yet again, and then he had placed the revolver close up to Bills' head and pressed the trigger for the fourth time, splattering the green moss with Bills' gore and brains.

"Ha, ha!" Slickmer had half shouted. "Haunt away now, Bills, and be welcome! Go ahead and speak now—when the wind whispers and moans and the moon sends its long shadows!"

Then Slickmer had fetched the mattock and the shovel (brought to the spot the day before and hidden in the bushes), dug the grave and rolled Bills into it. The hole refilled, he had carefully proceeded to obliterate every trace of the sepulture. He had worked long at this, using moss and leaves and sticks, and his work done, he had found himself almost wishing that someone would issue from the vine-maple tangle and step forth onto the very grave itself, so that he, Slickmer, might gloat over his work—the skill with which he had covered up every vestige of the dark, bloody secret hidden there.

Yes, if those bunglers would only be as careful as he had been. Why didn't they hide every——?

What was that?

Slickmer started, whirled so quickly in the direction of the cabin that the shovel and the mattock slid from his shoulder.

Surely a sound had come from his cabin. But all he could hear now was the roaring of the wind in the trees.

Great drops of rain began to fall; the sky was turning dark like ink.

Slickmer slung his grave tools back to his shoulder and moved on toward the cabin.

"Yes," he muttered, "I must just have imagined that I heard something."

As for those bunglers, now, why didn't they hide every sign, cover up every movement, every clue—as

he had done? Yes, why didn't they——?

Slickmer stopped short in his tracks, staring at the cabin as though he expected to see the spirit of Bills come forth from its shadows.

That sound had come again.

But the next moment Slickmer laughed and started on.

"Easy, old man!" said he. "You are getting the jumps already. The next thing you know you'll be hearing the voice of Bills. Ha, ha! In the wind. Yes, he's going to haunt me when the wind whispers and moans and the moon sends its long shadows!"

This struck Slickmer as very funny. He chuckled, shaking his head in appreciation.

The next instant, however, he was again fetched up. The rain began to fall with great violence, the wind to roar in the trees like a lion gone mad; but the man stood there as if unconscious of rain and turmoil, his eyes fixed on his cabin.

THIS rude pile of logs partly concealed the woodshed, in the obscurity of which Slickmer saw a form take shape. That form seated itself; another appeared beside it. Then the rain swept in a sheety flood, and Slickmer could see no more.

He was moving swiftly forward, however, muttering a curse at that momentary weakness. For he had let foolish thoughts of Bills get into his head.

"Huh," said Slickmer, "I wonder who's here."

He strode round the cabin. Three young fellows were there in the woodshed.

"Sports!" was Slickmer's observation.

They nodded a greeting, and Slickmer, as he stepped into the shelter, growled: "Howdeedo."

He began to feel fiercely angry, and a lump began to rise in his throat. Where had these confounded fellows come from, anyway? How long had they been here in the hills? Damn their souls, had they seen anything?

"I hope," one of the young men observed, looking at Slickmer a little curiously, "that we are not intruding. But the storm broke as we were coming by, and we stepped in here for shelter."

"Oh, not a bit," returned Slickmer, "not a bit of it. Make yourself at home. She's a wild one now, but she's only a thunderstorm and will soon blow over. Look at that flash! Probably in half an hour, though, there won't be half a dozen clouds in the sky."

Came a pause, when the young man, whom Slickmer had heard addressed as Rufus, said: "Any deer up this way?"

"Oh, a few," Slickmer grunted.

He knew where there were more than a few deer, but he wasn't going to tell these city dudes that.

"When," Slickmer asked suddenly, "did you arrive?"

"Got here—at the place where we are camping, that is—about 2 o'clock. Our camp is there at the bend below. If it wasn't raining so hard, you could see our fire through the trees."

Slickmer felt as though a load had been lifted from his heart. Two o'clock! Thank God, they couldn't know a thing! What a fool he was to let fears grip him like this!

"I suppose," Rufus remarked, "that you don't have many visitors up here."

Slickmer seemed to eye him a little sharply.

"No! Visitors to this cabin are rare birds. You are the first human beings I have seen for more than a month—since I was down last to North Bend."

"Well, isn't that strange now!" the young man exclaimed.

Slickmer's eyes seemed to snap at him.

"Strange? What is there so strange about that, son?"

"Oh, nothing; nothing at all, really. Only it struck me as—well, somewhat odd that a man hadn't seen another for a month, for more than a whole month."

"You seem," said Slickmer, "to be quite interested in my visitors—that is, supposing I have any."

"Not a bit, not a bit," returned the hunter, showing some uneasiness. "Only I thought that a man who went off without even closing his door must not have many callers. That was all."

"Not shut? That is strange!" Slickmer exclaimed.

He flung a sudden curse at his own head, for he had let foolish thoughts of Bills come into it again.

"Was *that* door open?"

"It was."

"Strange! Because I know that I shut it."

"Well," returned Rufus, "it was open when we came—about five minutes ago. I shut it myself, for the wind was slamming it back and forth."

"So that was what I heard?"

"I suppose so; it made quite a sound when it struck."

"And to think," said Slickmer to himself with colossal disgust, "that I let that give me spooky thoughts!"

And then a thought came that was anything but spooky—a thought that brought his heart leaping into his throat and a chill through his breast.

Not a single human being had visited his cabin for over a year. Such a contingency had had no place in his plans. There still remained behind those logs damning proof of Bills' presence there.

"Have you," he said abruptly, though he endeavored with all his might to make his question seem casual, "been in the cabin?"

"Of course not," Rufus told him.

"Of course not," one of the others echoed.

"I was just wondering," said Slickmer. "No harm done if you had. That cabin, boys, has no secrets to hide."

At this the trio looked at Slickmer, as he thought, a little queerly, but nobody said anything.

"I wonder if they did go in. Are they lying to me? Why be so emphatic about it if they didn't?"

But what was the matter with him? When he had wreaked his vengeance on Bills, he had been singularly cool. Why was he so nervous now? Why, in whatever direction he turned, did he see suspicion about to raise a finger and point it at him?

"Easy, old man!" Slickmer admonished himself. "All's safe, you know. Even if they did go into the cabin and see certain things that are there, it wouldn't mean anything to *them*, would it? Certainly not. For how could they know that those things had belonged to one Bills?

"Don't be foolish, old man," Slickmer continued. "Don't get jumpy, you poor fool, or you'll give the whole thing away yourself. You must be as cool now—now when all's done and everything's safe—as you were when you took Bills over there and killed him. All *is* safe, you know—even though you do get foolish scares. So don't get jumpy. Not a single clue remains to enable any man to——"

"By George," Rufus broke in upon his thoughts, "you must have got a bad cut!"

Had Slickmer suddenly found a sizzling bomb at his feet, the shock scarcely could have been more terrible. He succeeded very well, however (at least so he believed) in hiding this. A cut—blood! Good God, had he brought in some of the telltale blood of Bills?

"A cut?" queried Slickmer. "Now what made you think that, son?"

"Why, look at that mattock handle!"

Slickmer looked and saw a great smear of gore there just where the handle entered the mattock. He cursed savagely to himself. To think that he had overlooked that! Had he overlooked anything else—anything there in that mossy spot where he had buried Bills? He would go back and see the very first thing in the morning. No! He would go back this very day—just as soon as he could get rid of these cursed meddlers.

"Oh, yes," said Slickmer to Rufus. "I remember now. I thought the rain had washed that off."

The young man was silent for a moment.

"Damn him!" thought Slickmer. "What is he looking at me that way for? What's in his cursed head now, anyway?"

"You weren't out in the rain long enough," Rufus observed. "And besides, that part was underneath as you carried the mattock on your shoulder."

"Of course. How stupid of me! As for the cut, though, it was a bad one—I mean, that is, that it bled rather freely."

Slickmer touched his left arm just below the elbow.

"Right there," he said. "But it doesn't amount to much. Really I had forgotten all about it.

"See," he added. "She's clearing up now. Probably the evening will be as calm and fine as one could wish."

"Probably," nodded Rufus, his look abstracted.

Slickmer swore to himself as he watched him covertly.

"What's he thinking about, anyway?"

Rufus arose and glanced up at the brightening sky, then roundabout.

"Clearing up fast," said he. "There," pointing downstream, "is Jim's fire blazing away as bright as though there had been no rain at all."

"Four of you?" observed Slickmer.

"Four of us," Rufus told him.

"Well," said Slickmer when, five minutes or so afterward, the hunters were on the point of quitting him, "drop over sometime—any time. You'll always find me here of an evening, and we'll have a game of cards or something."

From one of the cabin windows, he watched the three young fellows until they disappeared down the forest trail. Then, with a muttered oath, he turned and became suddenly active.

He must visit the scene of the crime to see if he had overlooked anything there—as he had overlooked that blood on the mattock handle. He had no time to lose, for the dark autumn afternoon was already drawing toward a close. But there were two things that he must do before he went: he must gather up and hide (on his return he would burn them, every one) all the things that had belonged to Bills, and he must remove that blood, every spot of it, from the mattock handle. True, he had explained that. He had explained that very cleverly, hadn't he? The stain must be destroyed, however, perfectly, innocuous though it was.

He worked with haste, yet so carefully—oh, so carefully! Nothing would be overlooked this time.

And nothing was.

Within ten minutes of the time that the three hunters had disappeared, Slickmer had started on his way to the scene of the murder.

He had nearly reached the place before he noticed how dark the forest was now. This realization came to him with a force like that of a sud-

den, unexpected shock. He stopped and gazed about into the deepening gloom with a fear at which he hurled fierce curses.

"Buck up, you fool!" he said vehemently. "Are you going to be scared by shadows?"

He pressed forward through the wet undergrowth; but thoughts were crowding into his mind so dark and terrible that an indescribable fear—a thing of horror—gripped him as though with the talons of the Fiend. In broad daylight, with the sun glowing warmly on the dank green moss, he could laugh at Bills' spooky threats; but now, with evening closing in and gloom pervading the depths of the thick spruce forest, he could not have forced even sardonic mirth to his lips had his immortal soul itself been the forfeit else to fiends and goblins damned.

A cold sweat oozed from his forehead, trickled down his cheeks. Why hadn't he waited till morning? Yet Slickmer, though he paused once or twice, would not turn back. He would brazen this thing out; then he would never have to visit the hellish spot again.

When he broke through the vine-maple tangle and on to the grave of Bills, the man was trembling like a leaf in the wind. Nameless terrors ringed him around, seemed to grin and gibber at him and glide this way and that in the darkness. Sounds were all about him—only the water, shaken from the branches of the great trees by the wind, striking on the leaves; only the brushing of limbs, the low moaning of a tree rubbing against another. But, had these sounds come from the depths of hell itself, the effect upon Slickmer could not have been more terrible.

Bills had said he would haunt him. Could a dead man, after all, torture a man still clothed in the flesh? No, no! God would not permit a thing like that! But—supposing it was so—would Bills wait until the moon cast long shadows?

Slickmer turned to flee but with a mighty effort stayed his steps. He must see the thing through now—once and for all. But, as he looked, he cursed in wild, insensate anger. The place was already damnably dark. Why hadn't he noticed that the day was so nearly done? Why hadn't he waited until the morrow?

But, now that he was at the grave of Bills, he must make sure. It seemed to be growing darker every moment; he had not a single second to lose.

His examination of the place, however, revealed nothing. There was, in fact, nothing there to discover. This part of his work Slickmer had indeed done well.

"But," thought he, "what if the darkness does hide some clue?"

He struck a match. The wind was growling in the tree-tops, but here in the depths of the woods there was but the softest movement of the air. He held the match and scrutinized roundabout until the flame burnt thumb and finger. The gloom that followed made Slickmer exclaim aloud. The next instant a noise was heard close at hand, sending new terrors through the man. It was only a branch stirring in a sudden gust, but to the mind of Slickmer it brought a thousand horrors.

A long and loud moan suddenly filled the forest. It was nothing but the sound made by that tree rubbing against its neighbor; but Slickmer cried out in the extremity of fear and terror, turned and fled from the spot.

On entering his clearing, he felt a sudden relief. A feeling of confidence, of security, came to him. It was still quite light here in the open space. Above the mountains there beyond the river, a bright yellow streak glowed beneath the clouds.

"You poor fool!" said Slickmer. "That must have been nothing more

than the tree rubbing against the other in the wind!"

But, though he had left the dark forest with its grisly horrors behind him, it was a broken, soul-torn man that moved across the little meadow toward his cabin. What his guilty conscience, his jumpy nerves (so firm when he had killed Bills and buried him) and his foolish fears and suspicions had begun, that his visit to the grave of Bills had completed.

He built a fire in the rusty old cook-stove, and in the fireplace another, which ere the lapse of many minutes had consumed to ashes the last vestige of the last article that had belonged to Bills.

Not a clue remained now—only Slickmer could not be sure of that. Indeed, the uncertainties and fears that came crowding into his mind were as terrible as ever. In such a pass did he find himself when at last he stood safe—absolutely safe. There was not a thing in the world now to discover his crime to any man.

But vain were all his efforts to make himself believe that it was really so. Always the thought would follow: "But if——?"

He needed something to brace his nerves—those nerves that had been so steady when he had killed Bills.

He went to the table and took up a jug there. The jug was empty. He knew that it was empty. That very morning he and Bills had drunk the last of the moonshine it had contained. Yet Slickmer shook the vessel to make sure. There was no sound of liquid—as he had known there would be none. Yet he removed the cork and inverted the jug to make certitude certain. A few drops of the vile stuff fell onto the table; Slickmer slammed the jug down on the boards with an oath.

If he only had a glass of hootch! But there was the coffee. That would have to do the trick. He brewed a full pot and drank cup after cup of the smoking black liquid.

"This means insomnia, perhaps, but I've got to have a bracer, or I'll go off my head."

For a long time he sat in black thought and gloomy revery. What an hour of triumph was this! But, then, he suffered himself to become a prey to foolish thoughts and more foolish fears and fancies. He was acting like a weakling instead of like the man that he was—that he-man who had killed Bills.

"Like a damned female!" said Slickmer.

But in the morning he would be all right. Yes, in the morning his shaken, quivering nerves would be firm once more.

He came back to his immediate surroundings with a start. The cabin (there was but a single room) was growing dark. In the fireplace, only two coals were to be seen, glowing at him like baleful eyes. The flame of his kerosene lamp was sinking low; already the chimney was growing black with its smoke. Night had fallen.

Slickmer exclaimed aloud, then muttered savagely for that he had heard fear in his voice.

He lighted the lantern and took the extinguished lamp, the wick of it smoking vilely, out on to the back porch.

Not the faintest breath stirred the air—though Slickmer did not notice this. But he did note the heavy stillness that brooded over the place, broken only by the low and mournful wash of the river. Through rents in the cloud curtain, patches of clear sky were to be seen, blue and stardusted. The darkness, therefore, though dense, was not pitchy. But Slickmer shrank from it as though from the blackness of the Pit.

"Steady, old man!" said Slickmer. "Don't get spooky jumps, you know."

From a box nailed to the log wall, he took a jug, its capacity about two gallons.

"Hell," said Slickmer, shaking the vessel, "almost empty!"

There was sufficient oil, however, to fill the lamp nearly to overflowing, and Slickmer gave a sigh of relief. He would have light, anyway! He shot a look over his shoulder, then snatched up the lamp and fairly bolted indoors.

He had forgotten to return the jug to its box cupboard; he had even forgotten to replace the cork.

The lamp trimmed and lighted, he rekindled a blaze in the fireplace. Light! That was what he needed—light to steady his nerves. And there was enough wood in the cabin to keep a fire going till daybreak. He was glad of that—that he would not have to make a trip out to the woodshed.

It was 10 o'clock when he went to bed—the fire and the lamp burning high and bright. Heavy clothes curtained the windows.

"So that," said Slickmer, "those cursed campers won't get curious."

If he could only get to sleep! He would be a new man on waking. But minute followed minute, an hour passed, and still he could not sleep. It was that coffee. Yes, that was what it was. It was that coffee that was keeping him awake.

How still everything was! Not a breath of wind. If it would only stay like that—at least until he could get to sleep.

He looked at his watch, and he groaned. It was half past 11. The moon would be rising above the mountains now and casting long shadows. The night before, he and Bills had seen it come up a little after 10, and so it would be shining now—unless clouds hid it.

"If I only knew! But, old woman and coward that I am, I'm afraid to get up and look. Thank God, though, there is no wind!"

What was that? Slickmer groaned again. It was the wind at last.

And, as he lay there in his warm bed, he shivered as though the covers were icy.

He listened in clammy fear. Ten minutes passed, and then a twisted smile moved Slickmer's ashy face. What a fool he had been to listen for Bills' voice just because the wind was blowing—what a fool to even think of Bills' threat! Ah, crafty Bills! But his spooky bravado hadn't saved him.

The next instant Slickmer stiffened and thrust a hand to his mouth to stifle a cry. A low sobbing, moaning sound was mingling with the rushing of the wind, then suddenly ceased.

Slickmer's eyes rolled wildly in a face as livid as that of a cadaver. He pressed his hand to his mouth until blood broke from the lips.

A long wait succeeded, when the moaning and sobbing came again. This time there could be no mistake: it *was* Bills, and he was right there at the door. That scratching noise—that was Bills trying to get in!

If the wind would only blow harder—a devastating hurricane—anything to drown the voice of Bills. The wind did come harder, but Bills only raised his voice the louder—scratched harder at the door as he tried to gain an entrance.

How long the man lay there shivering and listening while that sobbing and moaning rose and fell and died away only to rise and fall again, he never knew. Fear held him stretched in his bed of terror, but a greater fear drove him from it. He crossed over to the lamp, trembling from head to foot, and turned up the flame until it began to pour forth smoke and soot and he had to lower it again. He threw wood into the fireplace, then began to dress in feverish haste. For he couldn't stay here. Bills would drive him mad—

why, Bills might get in at any moment!

But, when he stood ready to go, Slickmer groaned and sank, a quivering heap, upon a chair. How could he leave the cabin when Bills was there outside?

But how could he stay? Morning, if he did, would find him a madman. And, besides, Bills might get in at any moment.

Probably if he begged Bills to go away . . . Yes, that was his only hope. But no! Why hadn't he thought of that before? *That* was his only hope. While Bills was trying to get in at the back door, he, Slickmer, could steal out the front and make his escape to the camp of the hunters. He had cursed their presence, but how glad he was now that they were here! For surely Bills would not follow him right into their camp.

He began to open the door—guardedly, so guardedly! The least sound would betray him. Light went streaming out through the crack; but Bills, there in the rear, could not see that. Fifteen minutes, and Slickmer had the door opened six inches. Twenty, and the space was nearly wide enough to admit his body.

The moon was shining above the mountains with a cold and baleful fire, casting long shadows across the clearing—almost to the very door of the cabin.

There! Another inch, and he could slip through.

A sudden sound, however, jerked Slickmer round, at that very instant when the moon went out in darkness. It was only a piece of wood falling in the fireplace, but it cost Slickmer his hold on the door. As it swung violently open in the wind, a harsh grating sound came from the rusty hinges and rose to a shrill shriek.

A piercing scream, one of mortal agony and terror, followed. Then silence. Even the voice of Bills had ceased.

That scream reached the ears of Rufus. He raised himself up in his hard bed and listened. Nothing was heard, however, save the low growl of the wind in the trees and the voice of the river tumbling along on its eternal way to the sea.

"I wonder——" thought Rufus.

He wondered for a while, then got up and piled fresh wood on the fire. And still he wondered.

A chill wind was blowing, coming in strong, sudden gusts. Clouds were traveling swiftly southward. In one of the patches of clear sky, the young hunter saw the beautiful Pleiades twinkling down at him; then suddenly a fierce pale light broke through the forest, and, turning, Rufus saw, there behind the black, swaying trees, the broad gibbous moon shining with leprous fire.

Scarcely had he turned when the sound came again. And this time there could be no uncertainty: it was a scream.

Rufus quickly turned and entered the tent, seized his rifle and shook one of the sleepers by the shoulder.

"Whazza matter? Whazza matter now?"

"I don't know, Tom. Something queer going on. You needn't wake the others, though."

Rufus stepped out again—stood with his look fixed in the direction of Slickmer's cabin.

"Queer bird, that mountaineer," was Rufus' thought. "Darned suspicious, now that I think of it! Blood on mattock! I had forgotten about that, but——"

There! What was that, visible for a fleeting moment in a pool of moonlight? A wild, inarticulate cry, one of fear and horror unutterable followed; and a moment afterward—just as Tom thrust his pale visage out of the tent—a man broke from the

trail, half leaped, half stumbled across the little open space and sank, a quivering, chattering heap, by the fire.

It was Slickmer.

"Good God, man!" cried Rufus. "What's happened to you?"

"Bills came! I killed him—buried him and covered up the spot so that no man could tell! He told me he would haunt me if I killed him. But I laughed. My God, I only laughed! He said he would come in the wind and when the moon casts long shadows."

Rufus stared at Slickmer in detestation and horror and yet not without a trace of pity in his look.

"So," said he, "that was his blood on the mattock?"

"His!" moaned the murderer. "I confess all. I'll show you his grave tomorrow, and you can dig Bills up and see for yourselves that I tell no lie."

"Take us there now!"

"Oh, Lord!" burst from Tom.

"No, no!" Slickmer half shrieked. "Not now! Tomorrow, tomorrow—that is, if the sun shines bright."

"So the man you murdered paid you a visit?"

Slickmer moaned.

"He has been there for hours—I don't know for how long. I kept waiting—fighting the thing, hoping he would go away. But he wouldn't go. He still kept muttering and moaning and sobbing and scratching."

"Scratching?" said Rufus.

"Yes—scratching to get in. And at last I knew that there was only one thing to do to get him to go away—or at least be quiet. Maybe he told me. I don't know—my nerves are in shreds. But I knew there was only one thing on earth that would make him quit haunting me. And that was to confess! And, now that I have done it, don't you think," wailed Slickmer, "that Bills will leave me alone?"

"Did you see him?"

"No, no! What he did was worse than if he had shown himself. But I heard him. He said he would come when the wind blows and that he would dog me when the moon casts long shadows."

"When the wind blows," repeated Rufus.

Then to Slickmer: "Do you hear Bills now?"

"No, no! Not now. For I have confessed. Surely he will leave me alone now."

"And yet," said Rufus to himself, "the wind still blows."

Their voices had aroused the two others; and, when they came out, Slickmer asked them if they thought Bills would still haunt him now when he had confessed everything.

"Something queer about this," said Rufus in an aside to Tom. "I'm going to see what I can see over there at that cabin—I mean what I can hear."

"Tonight?"

"Tonight—right away."

"Can't you wait till morning?"

"What for? No! Coming along, Tom?"

"Ye-es—that is—certainly—if you are so determined to go. I don't think you ought to go over there alone. There's no telling what——"

Rufus made a sign, and Jim joined them.

"We're going over to the cabin to investigate," Rufus told him. "Keep an eye on that bird, Jim. Not that I think he's dangerous. On the contrary, I think he's a very harmless killer now. But it won't do any harm to keep an eye on the man."

Rufus had turned before the last word was spoken. Tom, after some hesitation, followed in his footsteps. A moment, and they had disappeared in the forest.

Just as the two stepped into Slickmer's clearing, the leprous moon slid behind a cloud and the wild landscape was involved in sudden darkness. The cabin rose, a black splotch; from the front doorway strong light was streaming out.

"Why—er—now why," said Tom, "can't we wait till morning?"

"No!"

"Confound it," Tom exclaimed in a husky whisper, "there isn't anything there. That bird is clean off his head. He just imagined he heard Bills."

"I don't think it was just imagination. A guilty conscience needs no accuser; but there is more than a guilty conscience in this."

"Aw, Rufus, you can't see anything now. Wait till morning."

"The moon will come again. And, besides, it isn't pitch-dark. Supposing we can't see, we can still hear, can't we?"

The other groaned.

Rufus was moving forward—a dark, vague shadow—straight toward the cabin. Tom followed.

Twenty feet or so from the door, the two hunters halted. The clouds had parted before the moon, and its fire was glimmering down pale and dreadful as light on tombstones.

"I don't hear a sound," whispered Tom, his voice trembling. "We might just as well go back."

"Wait!"

Rufus was waiting for the wind. Tom had not noticed that the air was still as death.

THEN abruptly the stillness was broken. The sound was low at first, but it steadily grew stronger —a low moaning and sobbing sound that seemed to curdle the blood in Tom's veins and heart. It rose, fell, rose higher than before; then it abruptly ceased, as though borne away on the wind.

"My God, what was that?"

"Bills!" said Rufus.

"No wonder," came from Tom's chattering teeth, "that that murderer is a wreck! Let's go back!"

But Rufus was going forward. He stepped on to the porch and stood, a dark figure, in the light of the doorway.

Again that blood-curdling sound was heard. Tom's face, in moon shadow, was like the visage of a corpse.

He was on the point of turning and dashing from that place of disembodied horror when Rufus suddenly turned and said:

"Didn't come from inside. Must be around at the back."

"For God's sake, Rufus, where are you going?"

"To find Bills."

The next instant Rufus had vanished around a corner of the hut.

A long wait followed—or a wait that was long to Tom. He grasped his rifle fiercely, holding it in readiness for instant use. But what could it avail? A bullet couldn't save him from this Thing.

The sound came again, more terrible than before; then utter silence.

A space, and Tom's voice was heard, rising in trembling and whispered accents: "Rufus! Rufus! Come back!"

A laugh was the answer.

"Come around here!" Rufus cried. "Come here and look at this!"

Tom went, not, however, without many a fearful glance cast to right and to left.

He found Rufus standing in the shadow of the house, by the porch. Though the spot was in gloom, objects there were to be distinguished without much difficulty.

"There's the ghost!" Rufus laughed.

And he pointed to Slickmer's kerosene jug!

"What are you talking about?" exclaimed the other.

"That's Bills! When we took shelter there in the woodshed, that jug wasn't here; it was up in that box that serves as a cupboard."

"I didn't notice."

"Well, I did," Rufus told him. "And the explanation must be this: he took down that jug to fill his lamp and forgot to put it back—he even forgot to put the cork in it again!"

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"Oh, Lord!" Rufus exclaimed. "Don't you see it? Look here! When the wind comes strong, the air—thanks to the way it eddies here or something—is forced in and out of that jug and makes the low moaning and sobbing sound that——"

"Ha, ha!" cried Tom. "Isn't that rich, though?"

"Yes," said Rufus to himself, "it's ha-ha now, but a moment ago it was spook-spook!"

"But that scratching he spoke of?"

"That rope hanging there by the door," Rufus told him. "It has a ring at the end, and that ring scratches back and forth when the wind blows."

"Ha, ha! You know, Rufus," said Tom, "I thought we would find it was something like this!"

A Short Tale of Horror

THE THROWBACK

By ORLIN FREDERICK

HEINZ was a corporal in our own battery. None of his buddies ever thought about him, or if they did it was only to wonder why he had been "made". He was extremely round-shouldered, heavy-set, awkwardly muscular. His hands were large and broad, his hair dark, his face cruel; but it is almost impossible to describe his eyes. They were tiny, black disks, shallow and yet too deep to penetrate, shifting yet darting queer glances directly at one. At times they seemed quiet (never gentle or kind, but docile like those of a great beast raised in captivity); but how they flashed when that madness was aroused!

There was a peculiar brute insanity which so entwined itself with his nature that it was inseparable. His eyes flashed with the venom of the pacing tiger when his will was crossed, and their glance sent shivers of dread, of unspeakable horror, up and down one's spine. It was not the ordinary fear of danger—I am too accustomed to facing death to notice that—but an intangible loathing, a horror which paralyzed all motion, a voice from ages past which spoke and held one in its grip while some great terror approached. No definite form of dread took precedence, yet there was all the grinding torture of crunching bones, the sound of ripping flesh, the smell of warm blood.

Time and again I have thanked my lucky stars that I never met Heinz alone on the open prairie in the dead of night. His eyes held a power of hypnotism which would have made

me powerless even to shriek. I avoided him as I would the beasts of the jungle if unarmed. He was of the species that strikes for the love of cruelty, and that devastated Belgium.

Somehow Heinz made friends of a few. I suppose they were satellites of his stronger will. Perhaps they were drawn to him by that blood-tie of their kind which ages had not broken—love of cruelty. His parents emigrated from Prussia in 1895, actuated no doubt by the same restlessness which caused the throwback of centuries in their first-born. What irony that he was to fight against the very land which lent asylum to his forbears!

We were stationed at a Western post when an incident occurred which I have never forgotten. The mystery of the affair has never been solved officially, but to me it is as clear as the noonday sun. Perhaps I am wrong—but I think not. I have no evidence other than my eyes and that strange fourth sense which held me in Heinz's power when his spells came on.

He had gone out somewhere in the afternoon. It was Sunday. He returned before 11 and turned in. I saw him as he entered the tent. His eyes flamed at that moment with a greenish light, like those of a wolverine in the shadows of the woods. His hands trembled as he reached for the flap, to draw it back, and his lips parted like a dog snarling over a bone. Then he grinned. That grin haunts me yet. He was like a lynx hard put for food when it has smelled fresh blood.

The following morning we learned that there had been a murder, supposedly by some maddened beast. A man's body was found on the open plain a mile from the nearest habitation. No one had heard any sound of struggle during the night, but the body was torn apart, ripped open by great cruel claws (or was it hands?). There were marks of teeth upon the neck where it (or he) had sucked the warm blood. The flesh was bruised from head to foot as if beaten mercilessly with a club.

Heinz was there with the rest of the boys to help if need be. But he seemed uninterested. He watched the distant hills more intently than he did the helpers. When he gazed at the blood-spattered earth he seemed neither surprized nor sympathetic but (or did I imagine it?) seemed rather to gloat over the carnage. It was as if he had seen it all before.

He was exceedingly docile that day, and during the next two months he seemed content. But gradually the old rumbling growl came back to his throat and the murderous look to his eyes. He took to wandering alone again at night. The beast was stalking its prey.

Weeks later the sheriff (he told me with the utmost horror) found a coyote killed fiendishly and left on the mountainside. It was in the same condition as the body had been, but no one ever connected the two incidents.

It was the blood-lust again, but as it was satiated it left him quiescent for a time. He had no soul. He died in France; and were I to guess, he was grinning when he died, for he lay in a pool of blood upon the battlefield in the Argonne.

The GREAT GOD PAN

by Seabury Quinn

"Run for your lives, it's Pan!" the girl called in terror. "I saw his face grinning at me among the leaves."

"BUT of course, my friend," Jules de Grandin conceded as he hitched his pack higher on his shoulders and leaned forward against the grade of the wooded hill, "I grant you American roads are better than those of France; but look to what inconvenience these same good roads put us. Everything in America is arranged for the convenience of the motorist—the man who covers great distances swiftly. Your roads are the direct result of motorized transportation for the million, and, consequently, you and I must tramp half the night and very likely sleep under the stars, because there is no inn to offer shelter.

"Now in France, where roads were laid out for stage-coaches hundreds of years before your Monsieur Ford was dreamed of, there is an abundance of resting places for the pedestrian. Here——". He spread his hands in an eloquent gesture of deprecation.

"Oh, well," I comforted, "we started out on a hiking trip, you know, and we've had mighty fine weather so far. A night in the open won't do us any harm. That cleared place at the top of the hill looks like a good spot to make camp."

"Eh, yes, I suppose so," he acquiesced as he breasted the crown of the hill and paused for breath. "*Parbleu,*" he gazed about him, "I fear we trespass, Friend Trowbridge! This is no natural glade, it has been cleared for human habita-

tion. Behold!" He waved his arm in a commanding gesture.

"By George, you're right!" I agreed in disappointment as I surveyed the clearing.

"The trees—beech, birch and poplar—had been cut away for the space of an acre or more, and the stumps removed, the cleared land afterward being sown with grass as smooth and well cared for as a private estate's lawn. Twenty yards ahead a path of flat, smooth stones was laid in the sod, running from a dense thicket of dwarf pine and rhododendron across the sward to a clump of tall, symmetrical cedars standing almost in the center of the clearing. Through the dark, bearded boughs of the evergreens we caught the fitful gleam of lights as the soft summer-evening breeze swayed the branches.

"Too bad," I murmured; "guess we'll have to push on a little farther for our bivouac."

"*Mille cochons, non!*" de Grandin denied. "Not I. *Parbleu,* but my feet faint from exhaustion, and my knees cry out for the caress of Mother Earth with a piety they have not known these many years! Come, let us go to the proprietor of that mansion and say, '*Monsieur,* here are two worthy gentleman tramps who crave the boon of a night's lodging and a meal, also a bath and a cup of wine, if that so entirely detestable Monsieur Volstead has allowed you to retain any.' He will not refuse us, my friend. *Morbleu,* a man with the charity of a Senegalese idol would not turn us away in the circumstances! I shall ask him with tears in my voice—*pardieu,* I shall weep like a lady in the cinema; I shall wring my hands and entreat him! Never fear, my friend, we shall lodge in yonder house this night, or Jules de Grandin goes supperless to a bed of pine-needles."

"Humph, I hope your optimism is justified," I grunted as I followed him across the close-cropped lawn to the stone path and marched toward the lights in the cedars.

We had progressed a hundred feet or so along the path when a sudden squealing cry, followed by a crashing in the thicket at the clearing edge, stopped us in our tracks. Something fluttering and white, gleaming like a ghost in the faint starlight, broke through the bushes, and a soft slapping noise, as though someone were beating his hands lightly and quickly together, sounded as the figure approached us.

"Oh, sirs, run, run for your lives, it—it's *Pan!*" the girl called in a frightened voice as she came abreast of us. "Run, run, if you want to live; *he's* there, I tell you! I saw his face among the leaves!"

One of de Grandin's small, slender hands rose with an involuntary gesture to stroke his little blond mustache as he surveyed our admonisher. She was tall and built with a stately, statuesque beauty which was doubly enhanced by the simple white linen garment which fell in straight lines from her lovely bare shoulders to her round, bare ankles. The robe was bound about the waist with a corded girdle which crossed above her breast, and was entirely sleeveless, though cut rather high at the neck, exposing only a few inches of white throat. Her feet, narrow and high-arched, and almost as white as the linen of her robe, were innocent of any covering, and I realized that the slapping sound I had heard was the impact of her bare soles on the stones of the path as she ran.

"*Tiens, Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin declared with a bow, "you are as lovely as Pallas Athene herself. Who is it has dared frighten you? *Cordieu,* I shall do myself the honor of twisting his unmannerly nose!"

"No, no!" the girl besought in a trembling voice. "Do not go back,

sir, *please!* I tell you Pan—the Great God Pan, Himself—is in those bushes. I went to bathe in the fountain a few minutes ago, and as I came from the water I—I saw his face grinning at me between the rhododendron bushes! It was only for a second, and I was so frightened I did not look again, but—oh, let us go to the house! Hurry, hurry, or we may see him in good earnest, and——" She broke off with a shudder and turned from us, walking hurriedly, but with consummate grace, toward the knot of cedars before us.

"*Sacré nom!*" de Grandin murmured as he fell in behind her. "Is it that we have arrived at a home for the feeble-minded, Friend Trowbridge, or is this beautiful one a goddess from the days of old? *Nom d'un coq,* she speaks the English like an American, but her costume, her so divine beauty, they are things of the days when Pygmalion hewed living flesh from out the lifeless marble!"

The murmur of feminine voices, singing softly in unison, came to us as we made our way through the row of cedar trees and approached the house. The building was almost square, as well as we could determine in the uncertain light, constructed of some sort of white or light-colored stone, and fronted by a wide portico with tall pillars topped with Doric capitals. The girl ran lightly up the three wide steps leading to the porch, her bare feet making no sound on the stone treads, and we followed her, wondering what sort of folk dwelt in this bit of classic Greece seemingly dropped from some other star in the midst of the New Jersey woods.

"*Morbleu!*" de Grandin exclaimed softly in wonderment as we paused at the wide, doorless entrance. Inside the house, or temple, was a large apartment, almost fifty feet square, paved with alternate slabs of white and gray-green stone. In the center stood a square column of black stone, some three feet in height, topped by an urn of some semitransparent substance in which a light glowed dimly. The place was illuminated by a series of flaring torches hung in rings let into the walls, their uncertain, flickering light showing us a circle of ten young women, dressed in the same simple classic costume as that worn by the girl we had met outside, kneeling about the central urn, their faces bowed modestly toward the floor, white arms raised above their heads, hands bent inward toward the center of the room. As we stood at gaze the girl who had preceded us hurried soundlessly across the checkered pavement and sank to her knees, inclining her shapely head and raising her arms in the same position of mute adoration assumed by the others.

"Name of a sacred pig!" de Grandin whispered. "We have here the votaries, but the hierophant, where is he?"

"There, I think," I answered, nodding toward the lighted urn in the pavement's center.

"*Parbleu,* yes," my companion assented, "and a worthy one for such a class, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

Standing beside the central altar, if such it could be called, was a short, pudgy little man, clothed in a short *chiton* of purple cloth bordered about neck, sleeves and bottom with a zigzag design of gold braid. His bald head, gleaming in the torchlight, was crowned with a wreath of wild laurel, and a garland of roses hung about his fat, creased neck like an overgrown Hawaiian *lei.* Clasped in the crook of his left elbow was a zither, or some similar musical instrument, while a little stick, ending in a series of curved teeth, something like the fingers of a Japanese back-scratcher,

was clasped in his dimpled right hand.

"Come, my children," the comic little man exclaimed in a soft, unctuous voice, "let us to our evening worship. Beauty is love, love beauty; that is all ye know and all ye need to know. Come, Chloë, Thisbe, Daphne, Clytie, let us see how well you know the devotion of beauty!"

He waved his stick like a monarch gesturing with his scepter, and drew its claw-tipped end across the strings of his zither, striking a chord, whereat the kneeling girls began singing, or, rather, humming, a lilting, swinging tune vagely reminiscent of Mendelssohn's *Spring Song*, and four of their number leaped nimbly to their feet, ran lightly to the center of the room, joined hands in a circle and began a dance of light, lithe grace.

Faster and faster their white feet whirled in the convolutions of the dance, their graceful arms weaving patterns of living beauty as they swung in time to the measures of the song. They formed momentary tableaux of sculptural loveliness, only to break apart instantly into quadruple examples of individual posturing such as would have set an artist mad with delight.

The music ceased on a long-drawn, quavering note, the four dancers ran quickly back to their positions in the circle, and dropped again to their knees, extending their arms above their heads and bending their supple hands inward.

"It is well," the fat little man pronounced oracularly. "The day is done; let us to our rest."

The girls rose with a subdued rustling of white garments and separated into whispering, laughing groups, while the little man posed more pompously than ever beside the lighted urn.

"*Tiens,* Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin whispered with a chuckle, "do you behold how this bantam would make a peacock of himself? He is vain, this one. Surely, we shall spend the night here!

"*Monsieur,*" he emerged from the shadow of the doorway and advanced toward the absurd figure posturing beside the urn, "we are two weary travelers, lost in the midst of these woods, without the faintest notion of the direction of the nearest inn. Will you not, of your so splendid generosity, permit that we spend the night beneath your roof?"

"Eh, what's that?" the other exclaimed with a start as he beheld the little Frenchman for the first time. "What d'ye want? Spend the night here? No, no; I can't have that. Get my school talked about. Couldn't possibly have it. Never have any men in this place."

"Ah, but *Monsieur,*" de Grandin replied smoothly, "you do forget that you are already here. If it were but a question of having male guests at this so wonderful school of the arts, is not the reputation of the establishment already ruined? Surely, a gentleman with so much of the appeal to beauty as *Monsieur* unquestionably possesses would cause much gossip if he were not so well known for his discretion. And, *Monsieur's* discretion being already so firmly established, who would dare accuse him of anything save great-heartedness if he did permit two wanderers—and medical men in the bargain—to remain overnight in his house? Permit me, *Monsieur;* I am Dr. Jules de Grandin, of the Sorbonne, and this is Dr. Samuel Trowbridge, of Harrisonburg, New Jersey, both entirely at your good service, *Monsieur.*"

The little fellow's fat face creased in a network of wrinkles as he regarded de Grandin with a self-satisfied smirk. "Ah, you appreciate the pure beauty of our school?" he remarked with almost pathetic eagerness. "I am Professor Judson—

Professor Herman Judson, sir—of the School of the Worship of Beauty. These—ah—young ladies whom you have seen here tonight are a few of my pupils. We believe that the old ideals—the old thought—of ancient Greece is a living, motivating thing today, just as it was in centuries gone by. We assert sir, that the religion of beauty which actuated the Greeks is still a living, vital thing. We believe that the old gods are not dead; but come to those who woo them with the ancient rite of song and the dance. In fine, sir, we are pagans—apostles of the religion of neo-paganism!"

He drew himself up to his full height, which could not have exceeded five feet six inches, and glared defiantly at de Grandin, as though expecting a shocked protest at his announcement.

The Frenchman's smile became wider and blander than ever. "Capital, *Monsieur,*" he congratulated. "Anyone with the eye of a blind man could see that you are the very personality to head such an incontestably sensible school of thought. The expertness with which your pupils perform their dances shows that they have a teacher worthy of all your claims. We do felicitate you most heartily, *Monsieur*. Meantime" —he slipped the pack from his shoulders and lowered it to the pavement —"you will undoubtlessly permit that we shall pass the night here? No?"

"We-ell," the professor's doubt gave way slowly; "you seem to be more appreciative than the average modern barbarian. Yes, you may remain here overnight; but you must be off in the morning—early in the morning, mind you. Never do to have the neighbors seeing strange men coming from this place. Understand?"

"Perfectly, *Monsieur,*" de Grandin answered with a bow. "And, if we might make so bold, may we trespass on your hospitality for a bite—the merest morsel of food?"

"U'm, pay for it?" the other demanded dubiously.

"But assuredly," de Grandin replied, producing a roll of bills. "It would cause us the greatest anguish, I do assure you, if it were ever said that we accepted the hospitality of the great Professor 'Erman Judson without making adequate return."

"Very well," the professor assented, and hurried through a door at the farther end of the apartment, returning in a few minutes with a tray of cold roast veal, warm, ripe apples, a loaf of white bread and a jug of more than legally strong, sour wine.

"Ah," de Grandin boasted as he washed down a sandwich with a draft of the acid liquor, "did I not tell you we should spend the night here, Friend Trowbridge?"

"You certainly made good your promise," I agreed as I shoved the remains of my meal from me, undid my pack and prepared to pillow my head on my rolled-up jacket. "See you in the morning, old fellow."

"Very good," he agreed. "Meantime, I go out of doors to smoke a last cigarette before I join you in sleep."

I MIGHT have slept an hour, perhaps a little more, when a sharp, insistent poke in my ribs woke me sufficiently to understand the words whispered fiercely in my ear. "Trowbridge, Trowbridge, my friend," Jules de Grandin breathed so low I could scarcely make out the syllables. "This house, it is not all as it should be, I fear me."

"Eh, what's that?" I demanded sleepily, sitting up and blinking half comprehendingly at his dim outline in the semidarkness of the big room.

"S-s-sh, not so loud," he cautioned, then leaned nearer, speaking rapidly: "Do you know from whence your

English word 'panic' comes, my friend?"

"What?" I demanded in disgust. "Did you wake me up to discuss etymology—after a day's hiking? Good Lord, man——"

"Be still!" he ordered sharply; then, inconsistently, "Answer me, if you please; whence comes that word?"

"Hanged if I know," I replied, "and I'm hanged if I care a whoop, either. It can come from the Cannibal Islands, for all I——"

"Quiet!" he commanded, then hurried on: "In the old days when such things were, my friend, Pan, the god of Nature, was very real to the people. They believed, firmly, that whoso saw Pan after nightfall, that one died instantly. Therefore, when a person is seized with a blind, unreasoning fear, even to this day, we say he has a panic. Of what consequence is this? Remember, my friend, the young lady whom we did meet as we approached this house told us she had seen Pan's face grinning at her from out the bushes as she bathed. Is it not so?"

"I guess so," I answered, putting my head back on my improvised pillow and preparing to sleep while he talked.

But he shook my shoulder with a sharp, imperative gesture. "Listen, my friend," he besought, "when I did go out of doors to smoke my cigarette, I met one of those beautiful young women who frequent this temple of the new heathenism, and engaged her in conversation. From her I learned much, and some of it sounds not good to my ears. For instance, I learn that this Professor Herman Judson is a much misunderstood man. Oh, but yes. The lawyers, they have misunderstood him many times. Once they misunderstood him so that he was placed in the state's prison for deceiving gullible women with fortune-telling tricks. Again he was misunderstood so that he went to the bastille for attempting to secure some money which a certain deceased lady's heirs believed should have gone to them—which *did* go to them eventually."

"Well, what of it?" I growled. "That's no affair of ours. We're not a committee on the morals of dancing masters, are we?"

"Eh, are we not so?" he replied. "I am not entirely sure of that, my friend. I fear we, too, are about to misunderstand this Professor Judson. Some other things I find out from that young lady with the Irish nose and the Greek costume. This professor, he has founded this school of dancing and paganism, taking for his pupils only young women who have no parents or other near relations, but much money. He is not minded to be misunderstood by heirs-at-law again. What think you of that, *hein?*"

"I think he's got more sense than we gave him credit for," I replied.

"Undoubtlessly," he agreed, "very much more; for also I discovered that *Monsieur le Professeur* has had his school regularly incorporated, and has secured from each of his pupils a last will and testament in which she does leave the bulk of her estate to the corporation."

"Well," I challenged, giving up hope of getting any sleep till he had talked himself out, "what of it? The man may be sincere in his attempt to found some sort of esthetic cult, and he'll need money for the project."

"True, quite true," he conceded, nodding his head like a china mandarin, "but attend me, Friend Trowbridge; while we walked beneath the stars I did make an occasion to take that young lady's hand in mine, and——"

"You old rake!" I cut in, grinning, but he shut me off with a snort of impatience.

"——and that was but a ruse to feel her pulse," he continued. "*Parbleu,* my friend, her heart did race like the engine of a *moteur!* Not with emotion for me—never think it, for I did talk to her like a father or an uncle, well, perhaps more like a cousin—but because it is of an abnormal quickness. Had I a stethoscope with me I could have told more, but as it is I would wager a hundred dollars that she suffers a chronic myocarditis, and the prognosis of that ailment is always grave, my friend. Think you a moment—what would happen if that young girl with a defective heart should see what she took to be the face of the great god Pan peering at her from the leaves, as the lady we first saw declared she did? Remember, these children believe in the deities of old, my friend."

"By George!" I sat bolt upright. "Do you mean—you don't mean that——"

"No, my friend, as yet I mean nothing," he replied evenly, "but it would be well if we emulated the cat, and slept with one eye and both ears open this night. Perhaps"—he shrugged his shoulders impatiently—"who knows what we may see in this house where the dead gods are worshiped with song and the dance?"

A MARBLE pavement is a poor substitute for a bed, even when the sleeper is thoroughly fatigued from a long day's tramp, and I slept fitfully, troubled by all manner of unpleasant dreams. The forms of lithe, classically draped young girls dancing about a fire-filled urn alternated with visions of goat-legged, grinning satyrs in my sleep as I rolled from side to side on my hard bed; but the sudden peal of devilish laughter, quavering sardonically, almost like the bleating of a goat, was the figment of no dream. I sat suddenly up, wide-awake, as a feminine scream, keen-edged with the terror of death, rent the tomblike stillness of the early morning, and ten white-draped forms came rushing in the disorder of abject fright into the room about us.

Torches were being lighted, one from another, and we beheld the girls, their tresses unloosed from the classic fillets which customarily bound them, their robes hastily adjusted, huddled fearfully in a circle about the glowing urn, while outside, in the moonless night, the echo of that fearful scream seemed wandering blindly among the evergreens.

"Professor, Professor!" one of the girls cried, wringing her hands in an agony of apprehension. "Professor, where are you? Chloë's missing, Professor!"

"Eh, what is it that you say?" de Grandin demanded, springing up and gazing questioningly about him. "What is this? One of your number missing? And the professor, too? *Parbleu;* me, I shall investigate this! Do you attend the young ladies, Friend Trowbridge. I, Jules de Grandin, shall try conclusions with whatever god or devil accosts the missing one!"

"Wait a minute," I cautioned. "The professor will be here in a moment. You can't go out there now; you haven't any gun."

"Ha, have I not?" he replied sarcastically, drawing the heavy, blue-steel pistol from his jacket pocket. "Friend Trowbridge, there are entirely too many people of ill repute who desire nothing more than the death of Jules de Grandin to make it safe for me to be without a weapon at any time. Me, I go to investigate."

"Never mind, sir," the smooth, oily voice of Professor Judson sounded from the door at the rear of the room as he marched with short-legged dignity toward the altar. "Everything is all right, I assure you.

"My children," he turned to the frightened girls, "Chloë has been frightened at the thought of Pan's presence. It is true that the great god of all Nature hovers ever near his worshipers, especially at the dark of the moon, but there is nothing to fear. Chloë will soon be all right. Meantime, let us propitiate Pan by prayer and sacrifice. Thetis, bring hither a goat!" He turned his small, deep-set eyes on the young girl we had met as we entered the grounds, and waved a pudgy hand commandingly.

The girl went white to the lips, but with a submissive bow she hurried from the room, returning in a moment leading a half-grown black goat by a string, a long, sharp butcher-knife and a wide, shallow dish under her free arm.

She led the animal to the altar where the professor stood, gave the leading string into his hand and presented the sacrificial knife, then knelt before him, holding the dish beneath the terrified goat's head, ready to catch the blood when the professor should have cut the creature's throat.

It was as if some heady, madness-compelling fume had suddenly wafted into the room. For a single breathless moment the other girls looked at their preceptor and his kneeling acolyte with a gaze of fear and disgust, their tender feminine instincts rebelling at the thought of the warm blood soon to flow, then, as a progressive, contagious shudder seemed to run through them, one after another, they leaped wildly upward with frantic, frenzied bounds as though the stones beneath their naked feet were suddenly turned white-hot, beating their hands together, waving their arms convulsively above their heads, bending forward till their long, unbound hair cascaded before their faces and swept the floor at their feet, then leaping upward again with rolling, staring eyes and wantonly waving arms. With a maniac shriek one of them seized the bodice of her robe and rent it asunder, exposing her breasts, another tore her gown from hem to hips in half a dozen places, so that streamers of tattered linen draped like ribbons about her rounded limbs as she sprang and crouched and sprang again in the abandon of her voluptuous dance.

And all the while, as madness seemed to feed on madness, growing wilder and more depraved each instant, they chanted in a shrill, hysterical chorus:

> Upon thy worshipers now gaze,
> Pan, Pan, Io Pan,
> To thee be sacrifice and praise,
> Pan, Pan, Io Pan.
> Give us the boon of the seeing eye,
> That we may behold ere yet we die
> The ecstasies of thy mystery,
> Pan, *Pan, PAN!*

Repeated insistently, with maniacal fervor, the name "Pan" beat against the air like the rhythm of a tom-tom. Its shouted repetition seemed to catch the tempo of my heart-beats; despite myself I felt an urging, strong as an addict's craving for his drug, to join in the lunatic dance, to leap and shout and tear the cumbering clothing from my body as I did so.

The professor changed his grip from the goat's tether to its hind legs. He swung the bleating animal shoulder-high, so that as it held its head back its throat curved above the dish held by the girl, who twitched her shoulders and swayed her body jerkily in time to the pagan hymn as she knelt at his feet.

"Oh, Pan, great goat-god, personification of all Nature's forces, immortal symbol of the ecstasy of passion, to Thee we make the sacrifice; to Thee we spill the blood of this victim," the professor cried, his eyes gleaming brilliantly in the reflection

of the torches and the altar fire. "Behold, goat of thy worshiper's flock, we——"

"*Zut!* Enough of this; *cordieu*, too much!" de Grandin's furious voice cut through the clamor as a fire-bell stills the noise of street traffic. "Hold your hand, accursed of heaven, or by the head of St. Denis, I scatter your brains in yonder dish!" His heavy pistol pointed unwaveringly at the professor's bald head till the terrified man unloosed his hold upon the squirming goat.

"To your rooms, my little ones," de Grandin commanded, his round, blazing eyes traveling from one trembling girl to another. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Evil communications corrupt good manners—*parbleu, Monsieur,* I do refer to you and no one else——" he glowered at the professor. "And you, *Mademoiselle,*" he called to the kneeling girl, "do you put down that dish and have nothing to do with this sacrifice of blood. Do as I say. I, Jules de Grandin, command it!

"Now, *Monsieur le Professeur,*" he waved his pistol to enforce his order, "do you come with me and explore these grounds. If we find your great god Pan I shall shoot his evil eyes from out his so hideous head. If we do not find him—*morbleu,* it were better for you that we find him, I damn think!"

"Get outa my house!" Professor Judson's mantle of culture ripped away, revealing the coarse fiber beneath it; "I'll not have any dam' Frenchman comin' around here an'——"

"Softly, *Monsieur,* softly; you will please remember there are ladies present," de Grandin admonished, motioning toward the door with his pistol. "Will you come with me, or must I so dispose of you that you can not run away until I return? I could most easily shoot through one of your fat legs."

Professor Judson left the altar of Pan and accompanied de Grandin into the night. I do not know what took place out under the stars, but when the Frenchman returned some ten minutes later, he carried the inert form of the eleventh young woman in his arms, and the professor was not with him.

"Quickly, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded as he laid the girl on the pavement, "give me some of the wine left from our supper. It will help this poor one, I think. Meantime"—he swung his fierce, unwinking gaze about the clustering circle of girls—"do you young ladies assume garments more fitted for this day and age, and prepare to evacuate this house of hell in the morning. Dr. Trowbridge and I shall remain here until the day, and tomorrow we notify the police that this place is permanently closed forever."

It was a grim, hard task we had bringing the unconscious girl out of her swoon, but patience and the indomitable determination of Jules de Grandin finally induced a return of consciousness.

"Oh, oh, I saw Pan—Pan looked at me from the leaves!" the poor child sobbed hysterically as she opened her eyes.

"*Non, non, ma chère,*" de Grandin assured her. "'Twas but a papier-mâché mask which the so odious one placed in the branches of the bush to terrify you. Behold, I will bring it to you that you may touch it, and know it for the harmless thing it is!"

He darted to the doorway of the temple, returning instantly with the hideous mask of a long, leering face, grinning mouth stretched from pointed ear to pointed ear, short horns rising from the temples and upward-slanting eyes glaring in fiendish malignancy. "It is ugly, I grant you," he admitted, flinging the thing upon the pavement and grinding it

beneath his heavily booted heel, "but see, the foot of one who fears them not is mightier than all the gods of heathendom. Is it not so?"

The girl smiled faintly and nodded.

DE GRANDIN was out of the house at sunup, and returned before 9 o'clock with a fleet of motor cars hastily commandeered from a roadhouse garage which he discovered a couple of miles down the road. "Remember, *Mesdemoiselles,*" he admonished as the cars swung away from the portico of the temple with the erstwhile pupils of the School of Neopaganism, "those wills and testaments, they must be revoked forthwith. The detestable one, he has the present copies, but any will which you wish to make will revoke those he holds. Leave your money to found a vocal school for Thomas cats, or for a gymnasium for teaching young frogs to leap, but bequeath it to some other cause than this temple of false gods, I do implore you."

"Ready, sport?" the driver of the car reserved for us demanded, lighting a cigarette and flipping the match toward the temple steps with a disdainful gesture.

"In one moment, my excellent one," de Grandin answered as he turned from me and hurried into the house. "Await me, Friend Trowbridge," he called over his shoulder; "I have an important mission to perform."

"What the dickens did you run back into that place for when the chauffeur was all ready to drive us away?" I demanded as we bowled over the smooth road toward the railway station.

He turned his unwinking cat's stare on me a moment, then his little blue eyes sparkled with a gleam of elfin laughter. "*Pardieu,* my friend," he chuckled, "that Professor Judson, I found a trunkful of his clothes in the room he occupied, and paused to burn them all. Death of my life, I did rout him from the premises in that Greek costume he wore last night, and when he returns he will find naught but glowing embers of his modern garments! What a figure he will cut, walking into a haberdasher's clothed like Monsieur Nero, and asking for a suit of clothes. *La, la,* could we but take a motion picture of him, our eternal fortunes would be made!"

The WOMAN WITH THE CROOKED NOSE

BY

Victor Rousseau

"The filmy vapor gathered shape and grew, suspended in the air face downward."

THERE exists a small general public that is always acquainted in advance with current affairs, is abreast of modern investigation and discovery, and lives, as it were, fifteen or twenty years in advance of its contemporaries. It was among such people that Dr. Brodsky's reputation had spread after the remarkable cure he had effected in the case of the jailer's daughter who was possessed by the soul of the Slav murderer. Thenceforward, while wholly unknown to that portion of the public that gleans its information through the medium of the press, he began to be besieged by requests for his assistance in many instances. He was asked to cure obsessions, to clean out haunted houses, to act as intermediary between the living and the dead by persons who misunderstood his powers.

Dr. Brodsky was in no sense a medium; he could not even produce the very ordinary phenomenon of making a table spin, and was, if anything, more lacking than most persons in psychic development. He was the first to disclaim any gift in this direction. His skill as a hypnotist, he always insisted, was no more than that attainable by anyone who devoted himself to the study of this acquirement. It was, therefore, embarrassing in the extreme to him when the ignorant mistook his abilities for those of the thaumaturgist, and for a long time he endeavored to escape the notoriety and persecution that pursued him. Finally, however, principally at my own instigation, he determined to give up his medical practise—which by now had netted him a comfortable competency—and to devote his services, gratuitously, to the science of physics.

"I can neither evoke ghosts nor lay them through any magic art," he explained to me in his self-deprecatory way. "All I can do is to apply my knowledge of physics to the production of results which could be brought about just as efficiently by the most ignorant person gifted with those mediumistic powers that I lack. Nor is my knowledge of these matters in any way one which originated with me. The knowledge of psychical phenomena has always existed, whether we consider the oracle of the Greeks, the Roman Sibyl, the Indian Shahman, or the witch of Endor who raised up the spirit of Samuel. But mostly it has been confined hitherto to the domains of faith and religion instead of being accepted boldly by science.

"Would you care to accompany me to a country house tomorrow to investigate a remarkable problem?" he continued, changing the subject in that sudden manner of his.

I was eager to accept, and the next morning met him by appointment at the depot. While we were being whirled in the train through rural New England he recounted to me the particulars of the case—the first which he had consented to investigate since the matter of the jailer's daughter.

He had been called upon for aid, it appeared, by a former patient of his, a certain Miss Suydam, whom he had once cured of a long nervous ailment. She was in great distress. A maiden lady of mature age, descended from one of the oldest families in America, she had lived since childhood with her younger sister in the old family mansion which they inherited. Possessed of a meager income, alone in the world, they had existed simply but not penuriously, expecting to pass the remainder of their lives in the solitude of the little village where they had been born. But some months previously the sister, who was of unusual beauty, except for a slight facial irregularity, had suddenly become engaged to, and married, a young artist of much unrecognized talent, and the three had made their home happily together until within a period of a few weeks, when the sister fell sick of a mysterious, wasting malady. Her husband appeared devoted to her and unremitting in his attention; nevertheless the disease continued to progress. Day by day the patient became more attenuated and despondent, until at last the local physicians gave up the case in despair, saying that there appeared to be neither means of making a diagnosis nor hopes for recovery.

And then (said Brodsky) something had occurred which struck terror into the maiden sister's heart. There was an old family legend to the effect that each death—especially when caused by violence or foul play—was presaged by the appearance of a ghost that glided silently along the passages of the old mansion by night and took, in each instance, the aspect of the person, male or female, who was about to pass over. On three successive nights the sister had seen this phantom move along the corridors, and, almost paralyzed with fear, saw it vanish through the closed door of her sister's room. When, on the last occasion, she gathered fortitude to enter, nothing was visible and her sister was peacefully sleeping. The phantom was the double of the sister, but etherealized beyond almost possible conception of beauty, and Miss Suydam had particularly observed that the slight facial irregularity was not apparent.

Then she thought of Dr. Brodsky, and begged him, if he could not save her sister's life, at least to endeavor to banish this awful messenger from the world beyond. So distraught was she, that she had even dared to suspect that the sister was being

slowly poisoned by the artist, though for such a crime no motive existed.

WE WERE to go down in the guise of two physicians—as indeed we were—and to make the fullest investigation.

"What inference do you draw, Dr. Brodsky?" I asked him.

"It is as yet impossible to say," the doctor answered. "We must see what sort of a man this artist is. The theory of poison would, on the face of it, appear very improbable. It may be that this is one of those rare cases, yet recorded among old families, in which the dead form, as it were, a guardianship over the lives of the living, and, at the appointed time, send one of their number to summon them into the world beyond. The fact that the spirit bears the family type of feature would bear out this supposition. However, we shall see."

We descended from the train at a little wayside hamlet, where we found a carriage waiting for us. The driver was a young man of great natural refinement, who introduced himself to us as the sister's husband—Walter Fotheringham.

He shook hands with us cordially. We stepped into the carriage, and the horse of his own accord took us up a steep hill that led to the mansion, which we could now see, looking very forlorn and dilapidated, perched upon the summit in the center of a desolate and extensive garden. We were shown into a large parlor, furnished in the style of the last generation, and more or less gloomy in aspect, though comfortable. Our host offered us wine and seated himself beside us.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, "I believe in frankness. Let us come to an understanding immediately, therefore. Let me say that I know your entire purpose in coming here, and shall assist you with all my ability."

It was impossible not to be impressed with the young fellow's sincerity.

"A painful scene occurred this morning between myself and my sister-in-law, Miss Suydam," he continued. "She has, I fancy, always been a little jealous of her sister's love for me. From words which she let fall during the heat of passion, I infer that she actually suspects me of administering some slow poison to my wife with the object of causing her death—I need hardly say that I should have no object to gain thereby."

"And this apparition?" queried the doctor.

"Dr. Brodsky, I have seen it," said Fotheringham. "I would hesitate to admit so to another man, but I have seen it on four occasions, and it is the exact reproduction of my wife."

"One thing is clear," said Brodsky, slowly. "Events of grave importance are pending in the spiritual world. There is no physical change that does not in some way betoken a spiritual one, and your wife is in grave danger. You are fond of one another?"

"We are devoted," said the artist sadly. "Doctor, if you can only save her——"

He choked with his emotion. I, looking at him, could not longer suspect him, nor, I am sure, did the doctor.

"Your relations are absolutely ideal, then?" queried Brodsky. "There is nothing about your wife that you could cavil at, nothing which has caused mental perturbation?"

Fotheringham started and shot a keen glance at his questioner.

"Why, the fact is, there is one small matter, but it is so ridiculous that I am heartily ashamed to confess it."

"Nothing on earth is ridiculous," said Brodsky.

"It is a preposterous matter, and the fact that I am obliged to keep it to myself adds to the little rankle. You may know, doctor, that some of us unfortunate persons are cursed with what is vulgarly termed the artistic temperament and are destined to go through life always seeking perfection, and never attaining it?"

There was a wealth of enigma in the doctor's smile.

"I thought that in my wife I had discovered a sublimation of every virtue of soul and body," said the young man. "But there is one slightest flaw in her appearance. I am ashamed to say it, but her nose is not entirely straight—a trifling flaw such as would pass unnoticed in one of less beauty, but in her is most evident because of her singularly perfect features otherwise. Of late the perception of this has become an obsession with me.

"But this is a scruple," he continued, angrily. "I don't know why I should have bothered you with a foolish detail. Certainly it in no measure affects my love for her."

"One question," said Brodsky. "This phantom—is the nose also crooked?"

"No, absolutely straight," said Fotheringham, "but in all other respects it is a duplication of my dear wife."

At this moment Miss Suydam entered and greeted us cordially. It was evident, however, that relations between herself and the young artist were considerably strained. She took us up the stairs and along a winding passage to the room in which the sick woman lay propped up by pillows. She was wasted greatly and of an extreme pallor; there did not seem to be enough blood in the body to support life. She opened her eyes, looked at us with indifference, and closed them.

At once I perceived the slight facial deformity, which was visible the more by contrast with the delicate perfection of the rest of her face.

The room in which the patient lay was one of those large, old-fashioned apartments with small panes of glass let into enormous window-frames and low ceilings, built out irregularly so that they form an irregular space bounded by eight or ten walls. At the far end the room tapered in toward the window seat, which had been fitted up as a couch on which Miss Suydam rested in the intervals of watching by her sister's side. It was arranged that Dr. Brodsky and I should watch here during the following night. The space was so screened off from the corner in which the patient lay as to form, to all intents, a separate apartment, while enabling us to be on hand should anything occur.

"It will not be necessary for us to watch all night," said Dr. Brodsky. "At what time have you seen the apparition?"

"Between 3 and 4 in the morning," Miss Suydam answered.

Dr. Brodsky was evidently pleased. "The period of the lowest vitality," he said. "We are getting upon the trail," he added to me.

I would have questioned him, but knew from experience that it would procure me no information. Brodsky liked to work out his theories alone. I could see that he had already formed one.

"You say you saw this apparition in the corridor?" he said next to Miss Suydam. "How did you happen to go into the corridor at 4 in the morning?"

Miss Suydam appeared embarrassed. "The fact is," she explained, "on each occasion I have had the most peculiar illusion that

my sister had gone out of the room. I find it so difficult to keep awake about that hour, and invariably the same experience comes to me. I dream that my sister has left her bed, and awake to find myself upon my feet in the passage, watching this horrible, trailing figure disappear in the distance. Then I come back to find my sister asleep."

"You doze off immediately you return?" asked Dr. Brodsky.

Miss Suydam looked guilty.

"I don't know how you know it, doctor," she said, "but I find it impossible to keep my eyes open. And in the morning my dear sister is always at lower ebb than before. I blame and reproach myself——"

"Never mind, never mind," said Brodsky, patting her hand. "You are certain that you did not dream all this?"

"I sprinkled flour beside my door last night and found my footsteps in it this morning. Besides, Mr. Fotheringham claims to have seen it. But how can I believe him, when I am tortured by such doubts?"

"Hush!" said the doctor. "You have grievously wronged him. Of that I am sure."

Miss Suydam's eyes lightened. "You are sure?" she cried. "I am so glad!"

"I am sure," said the doctor. "Now I want three yards of fine steel wire and a couple of stout staples," he added in his sudden manner. "Can you procure these before nightfall?"

"I can get them at the village, I suppose," said Miss Suydam.

"Get them before night, please," said the doctor.

They arrived shortly before supper. The doctor put the wire in his pocket and then drove in the staples outside the frame of the bedroom door, one on either side, some four feet above the ground. At Brodsky's suggestion I retired to bed immediately after I had eaten. He himself promised to call me at 2 for the beginning of our watch.

After hours of restless tossing and turning I slept, but it was only a moment, it seemed, before I heard Brodsky calling me. I awoke to find him standing, fully dressed, at my bedside, a candle in his hand.

"It's 2 o'clock," he said, softly. "Dress yourself quietly and come."

He waited at my side until I had thrust on my clothes; then grasped me by the arm very earnestly and said:

"The watch will not be long, but you must not fall asleep. It is a matter of life and death for that poor hag-ridden woman, and evil things will be stirring abroad tonight. Unless we both keep awake the issue will be fatal for her."

"Then—this apparition really exists?" I stammered.

"My dear boy," said the doctor, earnestly, "nothing is more real. And it is of incarnate evil. But come."

In our stocking feet we crept into the patient's room. Miss Suydam rose up to welcome us. "I am going to try to keep awake tonight," she said.

By the light of the candle I could see that the patient was slumbering soundly. She looked less pale and emaciated than during the day.

"She always looks better just before—it happens," said Miss Suydam. "And in the morning—oh, it is terrible. What is it?" she cried, hysterically. "For heaven's sake what does it mean?"

"Tonight will be the end," said the doctor, kindly. "Now sit beside her and watch. We will wait behind the screen."

We took our seats in silence. Dr. Brodsky blew out the candle, and the room was thinly illuminated by the half-moon that shone crookedly

through the little windowpanes. From our position, unknown to Miss Suydam, we could see her and the patient, clearly outlined against the wall. We waited, waited——

"Remember, at all hazard, do not sleep," were the doctor's last instructions. Then silence descended upon us. I heard the ticking of my watch, the distant night noises; everything seemed to blend into a monotonous and assuaging harmony . . .

SOMEBODY was shaking me. The doctor was shaking me. My eyelids seemed to have glued themselves down upon my eyes. With the utmost difficulty I forced them apart. The moon had risen, flooding the room with light, and Brodsky was standing by me.

"Wake, for God's sake!" he whispered.

Something was trickling down the sleeve of his coat. I learned afterward that he had stabbed himself with his pen-knife to fight off that overmastering drowsiness. Then, with a desperate effort, I shook it off, threw back that enchantment of slumber, and followed the direction of the doctor's gaze.

Beside the bed Miss Suydam sat, sunk into her chair, her eyes closed, her head bowed forward upon her breast. And from the bed, where the sick woman moaned and tossed restlessly, a filmy vapor seemed to detach itself, issuing, apparently, from her side. It rose and floated over her, gradually assuming the form of her own self, but even more entrancingly beautiful. It gathered shape and grew, suspended in the air face downward, chin to chin and lip to lip. Then, when it had become of the same consistency, it gradually assumed an upright posture, floated down to the ground, and seemed to pass bodily through the door. At the same instant I looked at the sleeping patient. She had ceased to moan and lay profoundly still, but shrunken up among the pillows like a seven-year-old child. Then, with a start, Miss Suydam sprang to her feet and wrenched at the door handle.

But the doctor had anticipated her. He sprang from where he was standing, I following, tossed Miss Suydam back into the room as lightly as a feather, and dashed out into the passage. There he stood, his back to the door, pressing it close.

My blood curdled and grew cold. Moving away, moving along the corridor without sound of any footsteps that awful phantom glided. A thing of devilish beauty. And I felt that at all hazard I must follow it, though it led me into hell. I must have started forward, for suddenly I was recalled to myself by feeling the little doctor's strong arms around me.

"Ah, thank God!" he whispered, seeing, I suppose, sanity return to me. "If you had followed, boy, God help your soul! Can you resist?"

Far away, farther and farther it moved, until it reached the bend in the passage and disappeared around it. It was moving in the direction of Fotheringham's room.

"Yes," I muttered, reeling unsteadily. "But it is going to him. Save him, save him!"

The doctor reassured me. "It can not harm him so long as his wife lives," he said. "They are united by a more subtle bond. This is the last night; another and it would have sucked the last of her vitality from her and achieved its ends. We shall save two lives tonight. But we have work to do before it returns."

"It is coming back?" I stammered.

"It must come back," he cried, and, whipping out the coil of wire from his coat, he fastened one end tightly to the staple and began to draw it across the door. And instantly, to my horror, I saw the thing reappear, begin to return upon its horrible passage.

Every evil impulse that I had ever known seemed to leap into activity as I gazed at it. It was the exact replica of Mrs. Fotheringham, but of hellish beauty, a caricature of beauty, as I might call it. And I felt my heart hammer within my breast, my hands fall to my sides nervelessly. But Dr. Brodsky had drawn the wire across the door, had fastened it to the opposite staple, so that it ran taut and true, a steel barrier, across the wood of the panels. Then as the thing drew near he turned and confronted it. And suddenly the moon went out and everything was plunged into profound darkness.

I felt an icy air breathe upon me; I heard a cry, I felt, rather than saw, that the little doctor had hooked his arms around the phantom thing and struggled with it. I heard him gasp, choke like a strangling man. I heard his heels hammering upon the floor. And all at once I fainted.

When I recovered consciousness it was broad daylight. The sun was streaming into the room, full upon the couch on which I lay. Beside me sat the doctor, with his usual cheery aspect. But there was something strange about his throat. I looked more closely; it was discolored by five small, livid spots, like finger-prints.

"It's all right, boy," he said, cheerily. "We've scotched the demon and our patient's going to get well. Miss Suydam and Mr. Fotheringham will be here in a moment and then explanations will be in order. Lie still and don't attempt to move. You've had a bad shock, but you'll be all right in a day or two."

Soon afterward Miss Suydam appeared upon the arm of her brother-in-law. Peace had evidently been restored between these two, judging from their behavior.

"We found you insensible upon the floor," the young artist explained, "and Dr. Brodsky in a hardly better condition. He looked like a man who had been putting up a stiff fight with a burglar. He must have been unconscious too, for it was early morning."

"He locked me in my room," said Miss Suydam, "so that I could not go to his assistance. But tell us the explanation."

"We are all going to be frank," said the doctor, "and so we will go back to the beginning. Miss Suydam, you suspected Mr. Fotheringham here of the most hideous crime that is conceivable."

"I wronged him greatly, and he has forgiven me," said Miss Suydam, smiling at her brother-in-law.

"You wronged him, but your suspicions were to a certain extent justified," said the doctor. "Unconsciously, Mr. Fotheringham nearly murdered his wife."

"What?" we all exclaimed in astonishment.

"Ah, when will you people learn that thoughts are more potent than things?" said Brodsky. "It is the easiest thing in the world to create a thought; it is almost impossible to undo it. In a sense we are all creators, and, if we only knew it, to every man is open the possibility of becoming as a god, by fashioning a universe. Mr. Fotheringham, you created this apparition."

"I—created it?" stammered the artist.

"You had married the best wife in the world, but you were not content with her. You desired perfection, that perfection which is unattainable. And you began to brood. Would to heaven that one slight blemish were removed from her features! This intensity of thought, acting upon the ether, actually formed a shadow after your own imaginings. You made a spirit, and it wanted a body. Vampirelike, it preyed upon the body of

your wife. Night after night it drew away her vitality.

"At first a shadowy wraith, it became stronger and stronger. It became a substantial thing, composed of all the essential elements of flesh. It grew in wickedness; every created thing must that does not come from God, the source of all goodness. And, had it succeeded in destroying her, it would have turned upon you and destroyed you body and soul.

"It was at the very threshold of the consummation of this achievement when I was sent for. I had my suspicions from the first, when you made your confession to me. Such cases are on record, notably in the records of Japan, in which country they usually assume the form of cats or foxes. From my cross-examination of Miss Suydam I ascertained that this evil thing, working in the atmosphere of artificially induced slumber, fed upon the life-blood of your wife during her sleep, grew strong thereby, and went through the passage seeking you. Had it been strong enough it would have destroyed you. But, though it grew and grew like some horrible cancer, it could not conquer you so long as Mrs. Fotheringham lived. So it had to return.

"You may have read that, in the making of Solomon's temple, no tool of iron was allowed to come upon the stones. Iron was also banned from the Vestal's house at Rome. The reason for these ordinances was that evil spirits can never cross it, nor good ones, either. It is the most earthly of all elements. No temple could bring down the favor of the protecting spirits were iron used in its construction.

"Accordingly, I barred the door with a wire of fine steel, which made it impossible for the vampire to return. Wood it could pass through, but that fine barrier was more effective than a thousand tons of oak. Well, the rest you know. Leave the wire there for a few nights, though its powers are broken, and it is not likely to trouble you again. It will soon pass back into that elemental source from which you, wretched man, fashioned it.

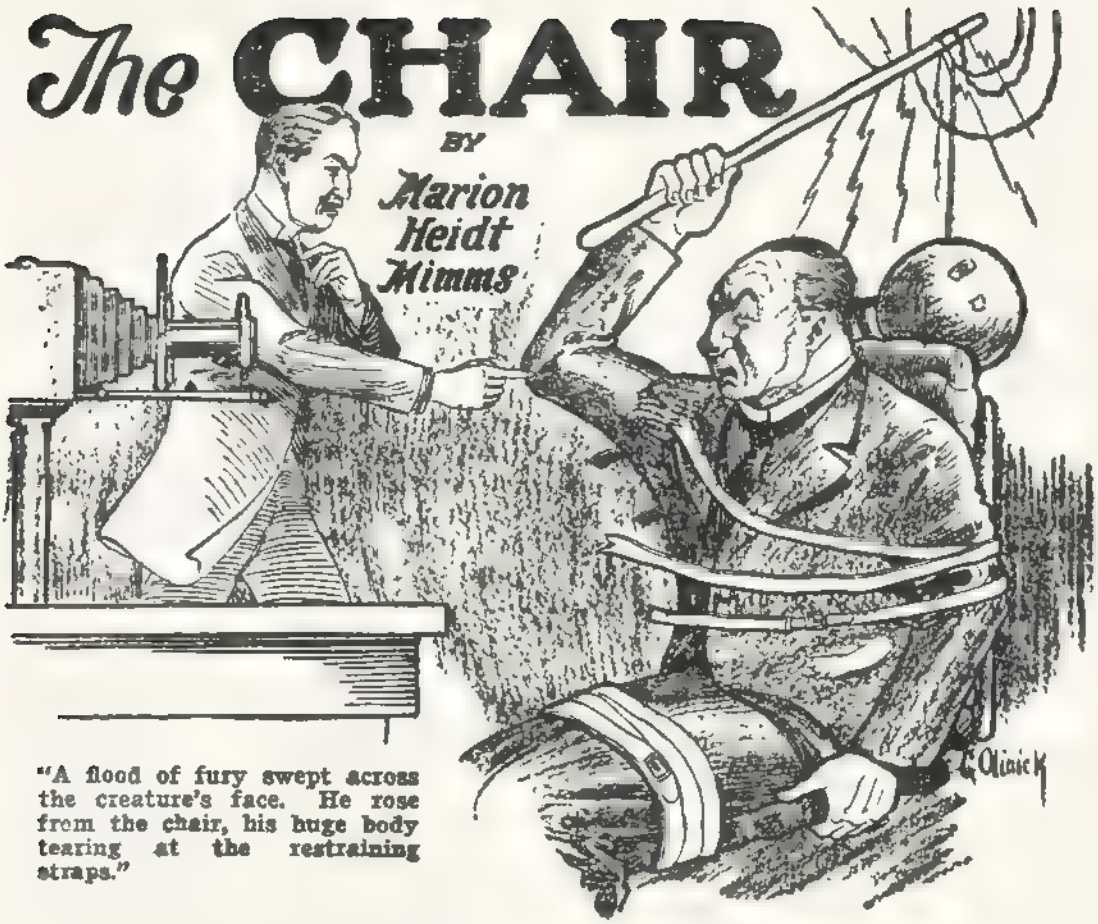
"So go back to your wife and be satisfied with her," the doctor concluded. "And take a word of advice: The next time you brood over things, you put a wire across your door and wear a steel waistcoat."

Note—This is the second of a series of stories each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky, "The Surgeon of Souls."

The CHAIR

BY

Marion Heidt Mimms



"A flood of fury swept across the creature's face. He rose from the chair, his huge body tearing at the restraining straps."

STRIDING across the room to a well-curtained window, Alan Carvel lifted a corner of its stiff white shade, and peered into the lessening darkness outside.

About the dim quadrangle, groups of college buildings showed a ghostly outline; farther off, a row of fraternity houses gave forth no single gleam. He had, perhaps, an hour or more for his task. There was not a moment to lose.

About him, in the dim-lit, closely shaded room, grim objects picked themselves out of the shadows; cases of shining steel instruments; jars filled with gruesome preserves; in a corner, a table, bearing the stark white form of a man——

The young student suddenly shivered. Overtaut nerves, like small, hot wires, threaded his body; his forehead held thick, moist beads, grown chill in that dank, bare room; exhaustion sagged his weary frame.

From a thermos flask brought for the purpose, he poured a cup of hot, thick black coffee, which he drank with a single gulp, then adverted to that silent, outstretched form.

With a needle, he made a swift injection of adrenalin into the muscles of the heart. Fitting a pulmotor over the subject's nose, slowly, steadily, he drove air down into his lungs. Next, in a sort of rhythmical routine, he lifted first a lifeless arm, then a limp, thick leg, over and over, back and forth, moving, kneading, pounding, pinching . . . The fire in the huge furnaces had died down; outside fell a thick, soft downpour of snow; but

oblivious of all else, he kept on. He must not stop! He could not! It was the chance for which he had longed. Since entering the medical school three years before, he had sought it; now it was here before him. Here in the long, white dissecting room, in the still, dark hours before tomorrow's clinic . . . His chance, which might never come again!

Since he was a small boy, this life thing had absorbed him. To restore life to the apparently dead; that was the thing! A wounded squirrel; a litter of half-frozen puppies; a horse overcome by heat: his path to young manhood had been strewn by such resurrections as these. Each had brought with its achievement a glow of satisfaction out of all proportion to its cause.

But now—a man! A sentient human being, with mind, with soul . . . Beaster Young was the creature's name, a name which in some way fitted his awkward, bulky form. Rather a handsome man he was, save for a particularly hideous blob of a nose. That nose, the student recalled, had figured prominently at the trial and conviction of this man for murder.

Young Carvel's thoughts, going back as he worked, seemed to acquire a sort of swing in keeping with his movements . . .

He had followed the trial with more than his usual interest, though having no notion, at the time, that the criminal would come into his hands.—Back and forth—to and fro—an arm, a leg.—It was because it represented the maiden effort of his friend, Berne Whitney, as prosecuting attorney for the state. The conviction had been quite a triumph for Whitney, since the evidence, though strong, was mostly circumstantial. The state's two chief witnesses, Otto Curlieff and Jan Steimbud, both had testified emphatically, "It was him that did it! I'd know that nose anywhere!"

Carvel rubbed the abused nose, tentatively—it was rather easily identified, he thought—never saw one quite so large . . . .

Queer, anyway, how the thing had come out. Even when it had been arranged that the body would be turned over to the medical school for dissection, young Carvel had not seen it as his chance. His theory that electrocution only suspends, not destroys animation, would not, he knew, hold good in the case of electrocution performed by the state. That august power does well its work. The voltage which it sends through the bodies of its victims leaves no doubt as to the release of that victim from life. Beaster Young, he had felt, would be no fit object for his experiment.

And then had come—his chance!

Quickly, but carefully, he had laid his plans. This night, he must act. At dusk that evening, he retired to rest. For the undertaking, full vigor was required.

Sometime after midnight, when the campus had quieted down, young Alan Carvel, with his necessary equipment, crept quietly down his chapter house stairs, across the college campus, and, by means of the key which he had secured, entered the back door of the tall, gaunt building where the body lay. He had, for his experiment, a few midnight hours; he must set to work at once.

BEASTER YOUNG lay quietly at rest upon the long dissecting table. Was it not a pity to disturb him? Yet how wonderful a thing to bring that body back to life! Life! A queer, elusive word, meaning, to some, so much; to others, nothing. What, he wondered, had it meant to Beaster Young? The man was a strong, vigorous creature, in full prime; that body should not be finally destroyed till Alan Carvel had had his chance!

In the midst of these reflections,

the student suddenly lifted his head. Sounds outside! Cockcrow, the rattle of a wagon over thin coatings of ice—early morning sounds! Soon the building would be astir, his task left incomplete. God! If only he could succeed!

Then, suddenly, quiveringly, he bent forward. Was there not a faint, slow movement of the heart? Just the slightest possible stir, where for so long all had been still? Quick, the oxygen! More adrenalin! After a time which seemed to him limitless, Alan Carvel knew for a certainty that the man before him lived.

Slowly, steadily, the heart action became stronger, the breathing more even—at a quarter to 4 o'clock Beaster Young opened bleared brown eyes to the eager occupant of that silent room.

Thought processes with this creature, always slow, now lagged interminably. He stared at the watcher, dully, heavily.

Then, like the creeping of a flame, memory seemed to sweep over the man. The thick, round head turned heavily, this way, that . . . .

"Hell?" asked its owner, curiously. "The Devil?"

The man standing over him laughed abruptly. "Not quite," he said. "Disappointed?"

Again, the criminal stared. Whatever he might be feeling, his vocabulary was not adapted to the strain of this situation. Finally, he drew out, sluggishly, "Where—is this?"

"Why—ah——" began the student. Explanation, he felt, was going to be difficult.

"Where am I?" demanded Beaster Young, curiosity enveloping him.

"Why—ah—you see—you were sent to this school——"

"School!" The criminal eyed the speaker queerly. "Then—I ain't dead? I ain't—buried?"

Young Carvel grinned. "No. Do you wish you were?"

Suddenly, Beaster Young lifted himself on a huge elbow. "The chair!" he cried. "The chair! I missed it! I got away——" He stopped, staring dazedly. "Then—what happened?"

"Why, you tried to cut some wires——"

Beaster Young drew a hand across his forehead. He seemed putting himself through a process of recollection. Young Carvel could almost read the man's slow thought. His escape, no one knew how—his climbing over the prison wall—a sudden interruption . . . .

"And was 'lectrocuted after all," finished Beaster Young, comprehending at last.

"Well, not quite, you see——"

For a while again, the creature sat silent. A queer turn the conversation was taking, thought the student, eyeing him. What would the fellow say next?

"School?" finally came from the man in puzzled tones. "Did you say school?"

The student nodded.

"Did they bring me to this school to revive me? No sense in that. Kill me one minute, bring me back the next——"

Alan Carvel stared at the speaker helplessly. In his planning, his imagination had never gone past the incident of bringing the victim back to life. That the creature, coming, would bring with him his faculties, —surprize, curiosity—this, though natural, was quite unforeseen.

Suddenly the man sat upright. His huge thick legs dangled grotesquely from the edge of the table, his eyes asking questions faster than his lips could form them. It was plain that thoughts, like leaping animals, were upon him.

"Is this—a school for doctors?" he demanded, hotly.

"It—is!"

"Ungh! I see. I know the ways of them devils. Heard of 'em before. They brought me here to *cut me up!*" A fury of recollection flooded the creature's face.

"That—that Lizzie Grim!" he cried out, thickly. "Where is she? She promised that if they—got me anyway, she'd take my body—I give her all my money for a first-class funeral—— Where's that Lizzie Grim?"

Before this situation, the student stood appalled. What should he say, what *could* he say, in answer to this? Tell this poor creature, murderer though he was, that the woman with whom he lived, whom, presumably, he had loved, to whom, as his 'next friend,' his body was delivered, had betrayed him?

"Ungh!" cried the victim, aloud. "I know! You don't have to tell me! I know! That gosh-blanked daughter of—has double-crossed me! —the money I gave her for my funeral warn't enough! She—she"—his lips thickened over the statement —"she sold me out! Damn her, she sold me out!"

"If she hadn't," suggested the student, soothingly, "you would not now be here, alive. You owe her something for that."

"She didn't care nothing 'bout where I'd be. All she wanted was the money. I—I'll fix her!"

This remark, coming out spontaneously, suddenly opened up brand new vistas of thought. For a time after it, he sat, dangling his huge, thick legs, making no move . . . .

The student, watching him, found himself transfixed by the problem which his act had raised. This man, this creature whom he had brought back to life, whose very existence depended upon him, this criminal, murderer—what was he going to do now?

As though reading the mind of his benefactor, Beaster Young burst out suddenly, "Now you got me, what you going to do with me?" He looked down over his own naked body, over the little heap of clothing in a corner of the room, over the shaded windows, and over the man who, all unasked, had restored him to life. Almost hostilely, he eyed this man, repeating, "What you going to do with me, now?"

"What am I going to do with you?" repeated young Carvel, "Why——"

As he never, in his scheming, had wondered what the restored convict might say, or do, so, too, had he never considered what his own next step would be. Perhaps, in his inmost soul, he had never really expected that the victim would recover. Or, since the human mind is said to be capable of holding only one profound thought at a time, his obsession had been merely the working out of his scheme. His experiment being, as he had known, a doubtful one, his mind had never gone past its possible success. It had all seemed so simple, at the time! Almost providential. There had been in the death house of the prison, along with Beaster Young, seven other miserable creatures, awaiting their end. The usual arguments for and against capital punishment had sprung up, and for weeks the daily papers had been flooded with letters upon this mooted question. It was not going to be a pleasant affair, this sending eight men to their doom. One official, already, on account of it, had resigned. Then Beaster Young, taking matters into his own hands, had saved the executioner this one pang. By just so much had the tension been relieved. The escaped murderer, discovered one night slumped heavily over a severed electric wire, had been cursorily examined, hurried out of the building, and the affair hushed

up. Here was one man less to follow that early morning trail!

Now enter Lizzie Grim. Lizzie, one of those small, fair women one sometimes sees, who seem born without souls, putting love of lucre before love of man, had agreed, for a consideration, to turn the body over to the medical school for dissection. The escape only hurried matters up a bit. Beaster Young, arriving at the building not long after his body had been discovered, was placed in the dissecting room, ready for the next day's clinic. It had all seemed so simple, then!

But now—what, indeed, should be done with Beaster Young?

The murderer, who, during the course of these reflections, had sat watching him like a frightened animal, now burst forth. "I say!" he cried in terror; "you ain't going to send me back—*there? Not give me back to them?* You wouldn't do that?"

Young Carvel gazed almost in stupefaction upon the man whom he had restored to life. Did he not owe the creature something? Was it fair to thrust him again through the harrowing experiences of the past few weeks? Beaster Young had not asked to be brought back to life. Could Alan Carvel voluntarily thrust him again through so dreadful an ordeal?

Again, what of his own part in the affair? How would the state regard his having interfered with its course of justice, by returning to it the criminal which it had been glad to lose? Alan Carvel, student of medicine, about to graduate, presumably with honors, the coming spring, might, on the one hand, be acclaimed famous overnight for having brought back a man to life; or, instead, he might be considered merely a meddler in affairs not his, causing his college and his state an unnecessary trouble and concern. He might even, he gloomily reflected, lose his degree, and be sent from the school in disgrace. All unwittingly, he had started something which he knew not how to stop. His situation being without precedent, the brunt of its solution lay wholly upon him. And he must make his decision *now*. At any moment, interruption might come.

Deliberately, he put himself through two imaginary scenes; the first, the arrival of the authorities, the discovery of himself in the room with the living form of the man they had thought dead, questions, explanations—what would they do? His imagination refused the hazard. The second scene: Beaster Young creeping quietly out at the back door, himself going calmly to his room;—morning, the body found to be missing! No least reason for connecting young Carvel with the mystery. Suspicion finally, for lack of a better object, falling, probably, upon Lizzie Grim. That archest of double-crossers, they would say, having gotten her money for her sale, must now, no doubt, have redoubled, and regained the body of her man! The obvious solution of the matter. . . . .

A slim finger of daylight crept past the curtained window, touched the naked, grotesque form.

"Well?" demanded the criminal, thrusting out a bulging chin. "Well? What you going to do?"

"I—I'm going to let you go!"

A light broke over the hearer's face. Till now, evidently, he had not realized his situation.

"Let me go? Free? With folks all thinking I'm dead? Ungh!" He had a queer way of making this sound. It always seemed to imply sudden, fierce understanding, coupled with a sort of sinister threat, and it gave the young meddler an uneasy qualm.

"I don't quite like letting you go, like this," he began, warningly, "but

—I'm giving you your chance. I shall expect you to go straight!"

"Straight!" repeated the other, cryptically. "Oh, sure! I may take to preaching, you can never tell——" He looked about him, and began to climb down off the table.

The student, eyeing him rather helplessly, reflected, grimly, that there had been a third solution which both of them had overlooked; Beaster Young, twice his size, might have laid low his rescuer with a single blow of his heavy fists, and departed leaving a double mystery for the authorities when they should arrive. As yet, though, fortunately for young Carvel, the murderer's faculties were not fully aroused. Apparently he regarded himself as putty in the hands of the slim young chap before him.

The student watched the ugly body as it slid from the table, as it donned the state's last gift, a suit of neat black.

"Here!" exclaimed the watcher suddenly, proffering certain articles which the state had not expected would be needed; "take my overcoat, my hat——"

"And a little change alongside," suggested the rescued one, extending his hand. "I gave that damned Lizzie Grim all I had. Ungh!" Whenever he mentioned the woman's name, a look came over his face which caused cold shudders to run down the observer's back.

"I say," he again suggested, "you ought really to appreciate what she did, you know——"

"I 'preciate it all right! Gimme some money, and let me go!"

The younger man ransacked his pockets and bestowed their contents on him. "Take this. It's all I have."

"Mail me a check tomorrow, General Delivery, James Brown," suggested Beaster, whose acquisitive faculties seemed entirely revived.

Through the back door of the building, the student watched the criminal depart. The light snow would soon cover his footsteps; no one, as yet, was astir.

Hastily, quietly, Alan Carvel removed all traces of his night's operations, took up his emptied thermos flask, and hurried, hatless and coatless, across the quadrangle, down the half-block or so to his chapter house. Creeping to his room upstairs, he cast an anxious eye toward his sleeping roommate, then slumped heavily into his own bed.

With his last consciousness, he was aware of a vast disquiet. What had he done? *What had he done?*

2

It had been, for Dr. Alan Carvel, a day replete with small annoyances. Just as success had laid its claim upon him, when his future seemed brilliantly beckoning before him, when, by all tokens, he should have been a happy, satisfied man, little irritating happenings, like small gnats, kept stinging him, recalling to him things in his past which he wished to forget.

His own practise, while extremely remunerative, was not proving to be all that he wished. Just after his graduation, three years before, a fortunate turn had given him study abroad, work at the Sorbonne, and later, practise in a large continental hospital. These had sent him, at the beginning of his fourth year, established against a background conducive to success, home to America. Here a certain knack at plastic surgery, successfully used after a recent disastrous explosion, was beginning to send him along that line, instead of the line of his choice. With his lifelong passion for restoring life still rampant, he was in a fair way to become a beauty specialist; a debasement, he felt, of his art. Not so bad, of itself, restoring beauty; but not what he wanted to do. He must,

he determined, call a halt. He would emphatically refuse the next case of its kind which came his way.

His feeling of general dissatisfaction was aggravated by the fact that for more than a week, now, his wife and baby girl, Vere, had been away on a visit. He adored his family, and missed them sadly.

But most disturbing of all had been a notice suddenly come upon in that morning's paper. With a roomful of waiting patients, the doctor took up the paper and read again that upsetting notice.

"The body of a man named Otto Curlieff," said this notice, "was found mysteriously murdered, yesterday, in a rooming house on F Street. The victim had evidently been struck a terrific blow on the back of his head, with some blunt instrument as yet undiscovered. No arrests have been made."

Otto Curlieff! There couldn't be two of them. Mysteriously murdered—no arrests! Otto Curlieff, too well he remembered, had been one of the chief witnesses at the trial of Beaster Young. With a shudder, he recalled the look of that criminal as he promised, sardonically, to go straight! Had Beaster Young, his own avenger, done this thing?

For the remainder of that morning, Dr. Carvel attended but distraitly to his patients. To a woman wishing a facial operation, he spoke abruptly, almost rudely. His every action betrayed his disquiet.

At noon, as he was preparing to go out for his lunch, a new visitor was announced. It was Berne Whitney, his friend, still prosecuting attorney for the state.

"Well, old man," began the physician, eyeing his caller keenly, "what's your trouble? I thought you eschewed the doctor and all his works."

"So I did. So I did, till lately!" The speaker moved restlessly in his chair, betraying a fidgetiness quite unlike his usual stolid self.

"Until lately," he continued, "I never believed in this thing called nerves. Always thought they took Adam's to make Eve! But now——"

"Now?" asked the doctor, wondering what was coming.

"Now, I am beginning to believe," confessed the other, "not in nerves, only, but in ghosts!"

"Ghosts!" Alan Carvel laughed, but it was not an easy laugh. He twisted uncomfortably at his desk.

"It's that dashed uncanny string of murders that have been committed more or less recently. They—and other things—I feel a fool to notice them, but—they are getting on my nerves!"

"*String of murders!*" repeated the doctor, his breath jerking.

"Perhaps, being out of the country, you've not heard of them. But—you recall that Beaster Young murder case, do you not?"

"I—recall it!"

"He, if you kept up with the affair, was sentenced to death. A day or so before the sentence was to have been carried out, he escaped, but was later found on the prison walls, electrocuted, you might say, by his own hand."

"Yes?"

"His body, it seems, was turned over to your medical school for dissection. There was afterward a rumor to the effect that it had disappeared—nothing definite—a sort of report that a woman with whom he had been living had stolen the body, after having agreed to its use for clinical purposes." The speaker rose from his chair and swung nervously about the room.

"Go on," said the doctor, "I am listening."

"Not long after the disappearance, or whatever it was," continued the attorney, "the woman with whom he had lived, Lizzie Grim, was found

brutally murdered, apparently by a blow on the back of the head from some instrument undiscovered——"

"Lizzie Grim!" repeated the doctor, heavily. "*Lizzie Grim!*"

"Yes. Did you know her?"

"No. Only heard of her in this connection."

"Well, mark this! A year or so ago, a man named Jan Steimbud, one of the chief witnesses against Beaster Young, was also found brutally murdered, circumstances the same——"

"Jan Steimbud!"

"Yes. It's a queer sort of trail. Yesterday morning, Otto Curlieff, the other important witness in the case, was found——"

"Brutally murdered by some blunt instrument undiscovered," parroted Carvel. "I—just read of it in the paper."

"To the spiritualistically inclined," said the lawyer, laughing nervously, "it might seem that the spirit of Beaster Young was abroad in the land, its mind set upon—revenge. And—there are just two more left of the chain; the judge who sentenced him, and myself."

"You!"

"Yes. I tell you, it's getting my nerve! Of course, one doesn't actually credit the theory of ghosts; but may there not be some confederate of the chap about?"

"Did you ever—know of any?"

"No. That's the queer part of it. At the time of the murder, there were no friends, hardly any acquaintances even, of the fellow, to be found. Only this Grim woman, who herself was afterward killed."

Berne Whitney stopped his restless ranging for a moment, breathed heavily, then continued, "For the last six months, whenever I am out after nightfall, I feel myself—pursued! Twice the night watchman at the building where I have rooms has driven away an intruder. Both times the man seemed anxious to keep his face hidden—one might think he feared recognition; as soon as there is danger of his being actually seen, he quickly makes his escape. But—the thing is getting me! Am I, I ask myself, next on the avenger's list, and if so, what chance have I to escape?"

"Are you sure it's really you he's after? Might there not be some mistake? Or merely imagination?"

"Do I look like an imaginative man?" demanded the attorney. "I tell you, I've tried to argue myself out of it, to forget it—Beaster Young is dead, I say. He had no friends. Who could be wanting to avenge him?—But it's no use!"

"Why not go away for a while?"

"Go away! What could that accomplish? Either the fellow could follow me, or he could wait till I return. Besides that, I can not get away without flinging business interests to the winds, and—I hate to be a quitter, frightened by a ghost!"

There were steps sounding in the outer office, voices—then the steps died away in the distance. Alan Carvel started nervously, then steadied himself with an effort.

"I seem to be acquiring your nerves," he said, glumly. Then, returning to the case of his patient, "I'm not, you know, a neurologist."

"No. But you're my friend. I thought it possible that, knowing me well, you might be less inclined to laugh at my tale."

"I might—give you a tonic," hazarded the doctor, feebly.

"Tonic!" snorted the other. "I tell you, old man, it's got me! I didn't come here to you with this absurd tale till it *had* got me! You may laugh if you will, but unless something happens, sooner or later this ghost—spirit, human accomplice, what you will—will get in its deadly work, and some fine morning you'll be sitting here reading in your paper a headline running something like

this: 'District Attorney Whitney murdered last night in mysterious manner. Killed by blow on back of head from some blunt instrument as yet undiscovered. No apparent motive for crime.' "

A little silence sat upon the room, which neither man seemed inclined to break, Dr. Carvel rigid at his desk, the attorney striding restlessly about.

"Don't tangle yourself up in those X-ray wires," cautioned the physician, suddenly, "they're rather in the nature of sleeping dogs."

"Dangerous, eh?" questioned the attorney, coming back to his chair. "You doctors are getting to know too much! Read a man's insides as well as his outsides—what next?"

"Your next will be a straitjacket, if you don't stop that twitching. Get out in the fresh air, eat and drink normally. Perhaps, for prudence's sake, you'd best not be too much alone. In the meantime, I shall see —what else I can do for you."

He walked with the attorney to the outer door, inquiring of the maid as he did so, if he had not heard voices.

"A man, sir, came in, but decided not to wait. He said he would return later."

"He gave no name?"

"No, sir. He was a queer-looking man, who seemed to avoid notice."

Whitney turned, and looked at his companion. "You see?" he said, significantly.

When his visitor had gone, Alan Carvel sat for some time in deep thought. What had he done? *What had he done?* Released upon an unsuspecting public a criminal of the worst kind; a criminal who, because it was not known that he still lived, could pursue, undisturbed, his career of crime. And what was he, Alan Carvel, now to do? What would a public confession of his deed avail? Beaster Young was at large. There was, as yet, nothing to connect him definitely with the recent murders.

It would have been, in a way, a comfort to the doctor to feel that he himself had committed an actual crime, for which he might feel a resultant remorse. But his deed had no status. He had revived a man who had been pronounced officially dead. Who could say that he had done wrong? Looking back, he felt that if he had the whole thing to do over again, he still would not know how differently to proceed.

For the ensuing two days, the doctor lived in a torment of suspense, doing his appointed tasks in a way sufficiently natural to avoid comment, yet never, for one moment, out from the shadow of the thing which bore him down. He must do something, of that he was sure. But what?

Daily he lifted the morning paper with a feeling of dread as to what he might see there. If Berne Whitney should really be murdered, as that attorney had prophesied, then he, as much as Beaster Young, would be the murderer.

When, late on the afternoon of the third day, the maid announced the queer-looking man again, Alan Carvel felt that the thing which, all along, he had been dreading, yet expecting, was to happen at last. He seated himself in his office chair, turned toward the door, and looked steadily at the bulky, closely wrapped figure which entered. Even before the visitor had let back a huge overcoat collar, and looked grinning into his face, he had known. Those thick, bulging legs! That horrid blob of a nose!

"How d'ye do?" asked the visitor, coolly taking a seat. "Thought maybe you'd be int'rsted to know I'm still alive."

Though his words were calm, his manner was distinctly nervous. He

played continually with a cane which he held in his hand.

"Well?" asked the doctor, his nerves jerking like mad. "I—well, I suppose I may say—I'm glad to see you, Mr. Young!"

The visitor grinned.

"Sort of relief to see you, being's you're the only person who really knows who I am!"

"Yes?" murmured the doctor, feebly. What should he do?—what should he do?

For a while, the visitor said no more. Back and forth across the floor he moved his queer sort of cane. It was heavier than might be supposed from its looks. One could tell that from the way in which it was handled. Back and forth—back and forth. . . .

"Been doing real well in your business, so I hear," he murmured, ingratiatingly.

Ingratiatingly! There was something more the creature wanted!

"Yes."

"Been reviving any more dead ones?"

"No."

Dr. Carvel studied that heavy, moving cane, and suddenly there came to him a recollection. "From some blunt instrument as yet undiscovered." Did Beaster Young, in his career of revenge, thus innocently display his weapon?

Presently, it became evident that the weapon followed a definite route. Over and over again, absently, but habitually, the man drew some certain outline. What could it be? Would it, if identified, offer a clue to the real character and thoughts of the fellow?

"Let me relieve you of your stick," suggested the doctor, eyeing his visitor keenly.

The criminal hesitated, returned the searching look, then set the article in a close, convenient corner.

"How've you been getting along?" asked the doctor next, filling in a gap which the other seemed disinclined to break.

"Oh, pretty well——"

Now it was his hands. Back and forth, back and forth. Presently, still apparently unconscious of what he did, the fellow took from his pocket a pencil, and began using it as he had his cane, over and over again, the same design, on the new white blotter covering the doctor's desk.

What was it the visitor drew? Without peering directly at it, the doctor could not tell. Yet curiosity burned him.

"You promised me," said Alan Carvel, still watching, "to go straight!"

"Ungh!" There it was again; that malevolent grunt. It set the doctor back more than three years, into the midst of that queer, unforgettable laboratory scene.

"All depends on what you call straight. Or crooked—I been tending to some things that needed tending—not quite finished up, yet. Then—well, I'm thinking of getting married!"

"Married!" What woman would be willing to marry that vicious, treacherous-looking brute? Now that he studied him closely, it seemed to Dr. Carvel that the man was much more dreadful to see than he had been a few years before. His face held no lines, no shadows, only a puffy whiteness, from the midst of which bulged two brown beads of eyes. The hands, never still, were strong, cruel, vindictive. A thin, too red slit of mouth opened stingily to disclose small, even, yellowed teeth.

Surely, in the beginning, nature never planned such a creature. Beaster Young must have been born with some redeeming trait. A thought came to Alan Carvel, suddenly; a creepy, uncanny thought.

When he had brought back this man to life, had the soul already gone on beyond recall? Was he gazing upon a creature made up of all man's evil passions, without the restraint that the spirit gives? And, if so, what could he do? Argument, reason, with such a being would be vain.

The doctor, eyeing him helplessly, repeated, for utter lack of anything else to say, "Married?"

"Yes, married. Why not? And that, partly, is what I want to see you about."

"Why, what could I possibly have to do with your marriage?"

"Ungh! Well, I'm sort of hampered in my business, you might say, by this—this lump on my face called a nose. It makes me too easy to recognize, even if I *am* dead, and it don't please the ladies!"

By no movement of his body did the doctor betray the fact that gradually understanding began to ooze over him.

"So I thought," continued the speaker, "seeing as you've sort of grown famous for—fixing up folk's faces—you might—you know—that is, well, I thought maybe you might make me another nose!"

"Ah!" murmured the doctor, comprehendingly.

"I ain't asking you to do the job for nothing," boasted the other. "I got money. I'll pay you well."

"Suppose," temporized the doctor, "suppose you come back here tomorrow, at noon. I'll have more time to give you then. And—I'll see what I can do."

"All right," agreed Beaster Young, leaning forward for his cane. Was there a threat in the way he lifted it? Alan Carvel could not be sure.

It was only after the creature had gone, that the physician thought again of his friend. Suppose Whitney should be murdered that night? Ought he not, when Beaster Young was with him, have made some effort to have the man confined? Suppose he should not come back again? Still, did one not have to give a definite reason for ordering a man's arrest? What charge could he have brought against the fiend?

Too, Beaster Young had been in evident earnest about the operation upon his nose. More than likely, he would wait upon that, before going farther with his revenge. But there was no time to lose. The thing had to be definitely settled, and settled soon. But how? How? What was he going to do? Remodel this demon's features, thus enabling him better to pursue his machinations? The story of the woman, and marriage, was most probably false. What the fellow really wanted was to keep Berne Whitney, and others, from recognizing him for who he was.

The doctor whirled his chair around, and was closing his desk, preparatory to leaving the office. As he did so, his eyes fell upon the blotter which Beaster had decorated with his drawing. Intently, he studied the design, and recognized it. Over and over again, minutely, perfectly, the man had drawn his obsession, his torment, the electric chair! Beaster Young, by the barest margin having escaped this chair, was spending the rest of his life in its shadow. God! If only, years before, Alan Carvel had let him pay his penalty and be done!

What went on, between that time and noon the next day, the doctor could never recall. That he did the conventional things was indicated by the fact that his actions caused no comment. But his thoughts, whirling around as futilely as a squirrel in a cage, found no solution for his problem. When Beaster arrived at the office the next day at 12, it seemed to the doctor who received him that the day had just begun.

The creature was, as usual, closely muffled. What did he do when the weather was warm? He came in high good humor, and watched the doctor close the door of the office after sending the maid out to lunch. The ubiquitous cane was here. Was he never without it?

"Sit here," suggested the physician, indicating a chair. "Let me examine your nose."

He bent above the other, wondering, wondering, parrying for time. What was he going to do? Certainly not change this fellow's nose, that he might better pursue his infamous career. But what?

"The bone, or rather cartilage," he said, finally, "has been broken——"

"Lots of times," admitted the visitor, freely.

"It might be changed, of course—cut down, reshaped—new tissue built up. But it would be slow, and very painful. For a while afterward you'd have two beautiful black eyes——"

The visitor grinned. "Wouldn't be the first time."

"There are a good many things to be considered," temporized the doctor. "First, foremost, I want to be sure that your motive is a good one."

"What in hell does it matter to you about my motive?" demanded the criminal. "You're a surgeon. I got the money to pay you for what I want." He began to gesticulate violently, and Alan Carvel, watching, had a very real conviction that should he refuse this creature's request, tomorrow morning's paper might refer to his office as "the scene of yesterday's crime!"

If only there was something he could do! Something to end the whole thing, once and for all.

What a fearful-looking creature the man was, anyway. Eyes without depths. Animal eyes. No, wild animal eyes. This was no man! Had the student, years before, he wondered, meddled with the machinery of life, with matters beyond his ken, wrecking, perhaps, some mysterious design? And was it now too late to remedy that meddling? Would it actually be murder, to put this demon out of the way?

Yes, it would be murder. There was no getting around that.

As, years before, he had put himself through each possible outcome of his situation, so, now, he reviewed his present plight.

He could, of course, ring for the police. That is, if he were very quick, he could.

He might agree to perform the operation, in exchange for the creature's promise to go straight. But what would that promise be worth?

He might remodel the fellow's nose, and then, when the man was gone, give the attorney his description, and have detectives set on his trail. But could he be sure that he would be caught in time to save Berne Whitney?

He might refuse point-blank to comply with the man's demand, and allow himself to be murdered, so that Beaster might more readily be caught. But this was not a pleasant solution, nor did the martyr's crown entice him.

He might agree to the operation, and administer too much ether. Again, not a pleasant solution, but possible. He allowed his mind to toy with this thought for a time. This course would be little likely to have unpleasant consequences. Patients not infrequently proved to have weak hearts; who would there be to say that Beaster Young was not one of these? An unknown, friendless patient, found dead as the result of any legitimate treatment in the office of a doctor of unquestioned standing, would certainly arouse no suspicion. This solution of the matter had its points. Oh, undoubtedly, its points!

It would be simple, final, neat . . . .

As for his own responsibility in the affair, he now realized that whatever the solution, he himself, for the rest of his life, would pay. Not in actual punishment, perhaps, but in regret—it could not be called remorse—for what had happened. He might as well eliminate himself from all consideration. He did not matter. But, what of others? In the beginning, he had felt, and paid, his obligation to Beaster Young. Now, his duty was to society.

The only possible flaw in the project of administering too much ether was that he felt that he *could* not do *it*! He might be a potential murderer, a passive murderer, but not an active one. His hand, at the crucial moment, he felt, would fail him. What then?

The criminal was becoming restive.

"Are you sure," asked Alan Carvel, to gain time, "that your desire for a new nose is merely a matter of —beauty?"

"What affair is that of yours?" demanded the creature, furiously.

"Perhaps—it *is* my affair. I brought you back to this world. But for me, you would now be——"

"I know! Rotting in hell! What's that to do with it?"

"The woman—Lizzie Grim—she was murdered."

"Yes, damn her! No woman can double-cross me, and get by with it!" He had said too much. He stopped, eyeing his opponent fiercely.

"A number of other people have been murdered," suggested the doctor.

"What's all that to do with me?"

"They were people whom you probably hated."

"Ungh! If I'd murdered all I hated——!"

Evilly, the fellow eyed his opponent, closely gripping with his hand the heavy, ominous cane. Around and around it went, making, Carvel knew, its design, the chair. Did he know what he was drawing, Carvel wondered, or had his obsession long since become a reflex action of arm?

"Suppose," suggested the doctor, finally, his manner becoming professional, "suppose you come over here, and let's see what the X-ray will do for you!"

"X-ray?" asked Beaster, uncomprehendingly. "What's that?"

"A comparatively new method of treatment. Sometimes, in cases like yours, the nose may be reduced by this means, instead of resorting to the knife. If successful, it makes a much better job. Come over here and let's see."

THE physician strode across the room to where the instrument stood. There was a dull blue light, with its accompanying festoons of overhanging wires, a narrow cot underneath.

"Just a moment," he said to Beaster Young. The criminal hesitated, looking first at the machine, then at the bland, businesslike back of the physician.

By means of hinges, half the cot was brought upright, forming a chair.

"Sit here," directed the doctor.

Beaster Young, somewhat meekly, for him, seated himself in the chair, still clutching his metal cane.

"Let me relieve you of that," suggested the doctor, casually.

"No!"

"I will have to—fasten these straps."

"Not so's I can't get up!"

"Oh, no—just a little precautionary measure."

He eyed the heavy, dull figure before him. If it came to a contest of brute strength, what chance had he? But as to wits——

Beaster Young was twisting about in the chair, churning his metal stick. The doctor was about to administer

the caution usually given people about to be X-rayed: "Keep your hands down!"

But a thought flashed across his mind; a thought which caught him with parted lips, and which closed those lips, the warning unuttered. He had observed that the wires of his transformer were arranged for a very high amperage, and had meant to change them. But now, he left them as they were—there was a chance—a chance—if only he could prod this man to violence!

"Listen to me!" he began, suddenly changing his tactics. "Did you really imagine that I would fall in with your nefarious plans? Did you think I would change that nose of yours, that you could better carry out your scheme of murdering my friend, the district attorney? Surely, surely, you don't think me as simple as that! Why, at any moment that I so desire, I can—ring for the police!"

Beaster Young twiddled his metal stick ominously.

"Try it," he suggested, ominously.

"Would it, do you think," asked the doctor, "help your case any to add me to your murderous list?"

"It couldn't make it no worse!"

Alan Carvel laughed. "Why," he jeered, "I fooled you! I played with you! You are in my power!"

His eyes upon those overhanging wires, greedy for contact, deliberately he played upon the criminal's obsession, and lied.

"Why, already you are in the chair! The electric chair! I've only to press this switch—to send you to eternity!"

A flood of fury swept across the creature's face. He rose from the chair, his huge body tearing at the mildly restraining straps. He lifted his metal cane, prepared to lunge——

"You—you——!" he began, thickly.

Then the cane crashed across those overhanging wires, there was a flash—a snap—the menacing voice suddenly stopped——

Fascinated, motionless, the doctor saw the thick limbs twitch, the eyes take on a look of extreme surprize, the huge body slump. Under the bluish light, the face assumed a ghastly grin.

Beaster Young had found the chair!

"Burgensdorf stood with his fists high over his head, facing that blinding flash, his features working in a wild exaltation."

YOU see, it was all Hasting's fault. That's why Lorrimer and I felt as we did about it, took the action we did, and still feel the same way concerning the whole affair. Besides, we had nothing to do with it, it wasn't under our jurisdiction, you might say. Call it God—Fate—Destiny, anything you choose. The whole ghastly affair was beyond our prevention or intervention. We were only witnesses, not willing witnesses, either, but horror-frozen into impotent bystanders.

I shan't attempt to tell you what kind of man Hasting was. I will only tell you what he himself said, and you will know. I fancy you'll agree with me he had it coming to him. He started the whole hideous mess himself, and when it came down to cases he couldn't finish it. Hasting was always starting things he couldn't finish. Rotten principle, that. There we were, all sitting around the campfire, the four of us. The air had thickened, and I was thinking idly that a midsummer thunderstorm was coming up, when Hasting began, apropos of nothing: "There was a woman, once——"

He made a short pause, and Burgensdorf kicked the fire into sparks with his right foot, cutting him short with a rather disgusted ejaculation. "Hell, there's always a woman!"

It was a mean remark. Innocuous in itself, perhaps, in the exact grouping of words and in significance. But in Burgensdorf's mouth it suddenly became a mean, sarcastic—I almost said a dirty remark. You know how some men have the faculty for making the most harmless words writhe

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Note—Corpus Delicti is a legal term used concerning murder cases. Unless a body be found, or some portion of a body—a patch of scalp, a charred bone, etc.—to give evidence of a murder, no man can be convicted of that murder. A man might even confess to a murder, but if no substance of the crime be found there is no *Corpus Delicti*—consequently no man can be convicted of, nor sentenced for, the murder.

AUTHOR.

with hidden meaning. Burgensdorf had it, when he chose to make use of it. Hasting glanced across at him and his eyes snapped.

"Now, what the devil do you mean by that, Burgy?"

But Burgensdorf wouldn't be baited. He rolled a potato from the fire, jammed it on a stick and reached for the salt.

"If the shoe fits, put it on," he answered mildly.

"I suppose you mean there's always a woman where I'm concerned?" Hasting spat a belligerent challenge.

"Ah!" Burgensdorf half whispered; "it *did* fit, didn't it?"

"Humpf!" Hasting flung off Burgensdorf's insinuation with an insolent shrug and went calmly on. "The trouble was, there was *another* woman." He glanced covertly at Burgensdorf, but Burgy went on eating his potato as though he hadn't heard. Just as Hasting was about to resume speaking, Burgy said, rather loudly, "Blotto! There's always another woman."

"Say, I wish you'd go to the devil with your insulting remarks. I'm talking to Lorrimer." Hasting abruptly turned his back on Burgensdorf, with the obvious intent of ignoring him and his answers.

Lorrimer smiled indolently, and winked at me. He seldom gave any serious consideration to the argumentative tendencies the conversation always developed when Hasting and Burgensdorf were both present. The enmity between those two men, a strange, almost unconscious enmity, made itself rather unpleasantly felt at times. A veiled undercurrent that was almost malignant ran beneath the surface antagonism. And none of us knew what it was all about. Hasting himself didn't know! But the rest of us had a sneaking belief that Burgy knew, quite accurately, and that when he chose to reveal what he knew things would pop.

(They popped, all right! I'm not asking you to believe this: but the thing happened just as I set it down. You needn't strain your credulity. I frankly admit if I hadn't *seen* it I shouldn't believe it either. And if you dislike things grisly, if you shrink from seeing the hand of Destiny at its ghastly work, if you had rather avoid viewing the Law of Retribution on a hideous mission, you had better read no farther. This isn't exactly a pretty story.)

Lorrimer's grin widened as he glanced at Burgensdorf, and answered Hasting's remark.

"Well, spill it, old top. What about her? Them, I should say."

Lorrimer didn't like Hasting. None of us did. But he belonged to the association, and we couldn't bar him from the lodge grounds. We'd been inwardly cursing that he had to foist himself on our little party that night. But since, we've been pretty glad there were no witnesses to what happened save ourselves.

"The worst of it is," Hasting answered with a queer kind of eagerness, "that I don't know to this day which one I really loved, and for which I had only a transient passion. There—why, there must have been a difference, Lorrimer."

"There's always a difference," Burgensdorf interjected, rolling another potato from the fire and not looking at Hasting. "But we seldom see it till it's too late. There are a lot of things we don't see till it's too late. Bitter words, those. *Too late!*" Burgy gave those words a weird vehemence.

Hasting leaned forward, and the firelight flared in his face as he looked around at Burgensdorf. But it wasn't the firelight that made angry daggers of his eyes. The look was hidden so quickly that Lorrimer didn't see it. Burgensdorf caught it

—he was a thousand years old that night—and he grinned suddenly.

Hasting exploded. "Don't grin like a damned cynic," he said sharply. "What do you mean, too late? *What's* too late?"

"Lots of things." Burgensdorf sat up stiffly, and the potato on the stick broke in two and rolled into the fire. He saw it, but he didn't care. He made no move to retrieve the potato. Right then he didn't want to spit anything. He'd been spitted too cruelly himself. "After it's too late you're as helpless as—as that potato." He pointed to the blackened vegetable in the ash. The sky rumbled with the first thunderclap of the storm, and a flash of lightning streaked the air behind Burgensdorf. Something ominous was in the air. It was a fitting night for gruesome things.

HASTING eyed him narrowly. No one moved. Then Hasting spoke with an abrupt sneer.

"You're a wise guy, aren't you, Burgy? Still, you don't know it *all*". He turned half angrily to Lorrimer. "Of course, it *is* too late. They're both dead. But the thing's been riding me for twenty years, and I've got a kind of hallucination that I'd find peace if I could get it all straightened out in my mind. It's mostly in my own mind, really. The whole thing."

"It's always mostly in the mind," said Burgensdorf softly.

"Would you mind changing your tune for a while?" Hasting turned upon him with flashing eyes, and the thunder roared beyond the high forest. "It's getting on my nerves."

An odd flicker went over Burgensdorf's face, and Lorrimer saw it. He stared, and raised his brows at me. Burgy might just as well have said, "That's what I was trying to do." But Lorrimer was out of it, and he stayed out. So did I. I've always been glad we did. We just sat and looked on, kept our mouths shut and our eyes and ears decidedly open.

"It was a funny tangle," Hasting went on, exactly as though he didn't want to but was forced into it. "I was mad about them both. As I remarked before, one of them I know I loved, and one of them I know I valued only as a transient passion. But the devil of it is, I didn't know which was which—and don't to this day."

"Which one loved you?" Burgensdorf asked suddenly.

"Ass!" Hasting flared. "Both. At least, they both said they did. I was in a hell of a hole. One of them was just an innocent, happy little kid. Virginal as a young swan. You know how a fellow feels—you love anything that's young, and innocent, and clean."

"What *is* youth? What *is* innocence. What *is* cleanliness?" Burgy's voice cut through another thunderclap.

"*You* tell us," Hasting answered with a nasty leer.

"Oh, I *could*." Burgensdorf stared at him through the shadows, and Hasting shrugged, watching the lightning.

"Well, she had 'em," he went on. "And I was mad about her till the woman came along. She was older than the girl—the girl was barely twenty, while the woman was thirty-two. Only two years younger than I. She'd been married, and she'd had two or three lovers, she made no secret of it. There wasn't much she didn't know. About life, and men. Don't get the idea that she was wanton. Good Lord, no! She was one of those women who are a law unto themselves. I sometimes wonder if it wasn't she who had the youth and innocence and cleanliness, after all."

"Really!" Burgensdorf's one word was like a whip-crack. Hasting started, opened his mouth as

though to snap back, thought better of it and resumed his story.

"You're going to say this is melodramatic. But *life's* melodramatic."

"If you live it," interrupted Burgensdorf.

"Say, *will* you keep still?" Hasting shot Burgensdorf a belligerent glance and turned back to Lorrimer. I've always remembered that he completely forgot I was there. "Who's telling this, Lorrimer—I or that big goofus?" he asked sourly. Lorrimer didn't answer, and Hasting went on. "There's one thing of which I'm certain, anyway. That woman loved me, all right. So did the girl. But I was up against a stone wall. I decided to leave it to them. I told the girl I thought I'd better not marry her. You see, she was a native. But she was beautiful! Gad, she *was!* This was in—well, in the tropics. That's near enough.

"I couldn't countenance this business of just taking a native woman, no decent white man could, you know. If I wanted the girl I considered it was up to me to marry her. And white women were scarce. This other woman was the only unmarried white woman in the whole filthy place, and I had to remember she was none too clean."

"Watch out what you say," Burgensdorf cut in. His voice was low, deadly, menacing, and it cut through the approaching storm like the roll of a drum. Both Lorrimer and I glanced quickly at him, and his face was the color of putty. It was then Lorry and I began to be afraid. But Hasting only sneered in bravado, and went on.

"Well, she admitted it. The native girl had never even known a man's kiss. That's cleanliness for you! And the white woman had been the property of four or five men. Yet—I was mad over both of them. The girl went into hysterics, threatened to commit suicide and all that. I knew she'd do it, too. When one of those girls loves a white man, I tell you it's the real thing. And she held me in a kind of awe, because I never tried to make any advances toward her, as most of the men in port would have done. She fairly worshiped me. So I went and told the white woman I felt honor-bound to marry the girl, because she loved me and I had no right to break her heart. The woman just stood and stared at me, but she went colorless to the lips. Then I knew I loved her, too. I guess maybe that's the answer. I loved both of them. I don't know. She stood and stared, and went pasty white, and after a long time she said, 'A native girl!' Just that, and no more. Then she turned and walked off and left me. You'd have thought I'd insulted her!"

"By God, you'd *better* be careful!" Burgensdorf's voice made the hair rise on my scalp, and I saw Lorrimer's hand shake as he shielded a match from the wind to light a cigarette.

"What's it to you?" Hasting answered insolently. "I'm not insulting my race, at least. She was only *one* white woman. And it's all over, these twenty years. Save in my mind. Well, I did marry the native girl. We were really decently happy for a long time. Until I began to realize what a crazy code of morals they had down there. The men who'd taken native women 'without benefit of clergy' ostracized me, cut me dead on the streets. Fancy that, will you? The few white women in the putrid hole got out of my vicinity the moment I appeared. I finally took to staying away from people, out in the hut with my wife. Then she began to get on my nerves, always kowtowing and fussing around me. Her very love, tense and wild, which had lured me at first, became a scourge on my back, because she was the cause of my ostracism. I'd creep

out into the hot, sticky shade to get away from her. But she'd always manage to find me.

"I got desperate for some of my own kind. I wondered if the one white woman who might still feel any compassion for my estate would cut me. I couldn't stand things the way they were, so I went to her house one night to find out. She didn't shrink from my presence. Just sat sad-eyed and silent, listening to me talk. It was then I began to realize what I'd done. Thrown down an even half-way decent woman of my own race for a beastly little native. I begged her to let me see her once in a while. She hesitated, saying it would mean disaster for her if it were ever discovered. I've neglected to say that everyone in the town loved her, took her for what she was, set her high in their respect. I promised to be meticulously discreet in my comings and goings, and she finally gave in to my pleading. I realized then that she loved me, too. I couldn't see why."

"God! Neither can I!" The words were like vitriol.

"Shut up!" Hasting turned on Burgensdorf furiously. For a moment there was a hideous, menacing silence, then Hasting resumed smoothly. "I went to see her regularly. It was the only thing which made it possible for me to go on with the native girl. Then that fiendish wife of mine followed me to see where I went. God, she made an awful scene! Threatened to do all manner of inconceivably horrible things if I didn't promise her never to see the white woman again. By Jove, I had to promise. I was afraid not to! But I didn't intend to keep the promise, not by a jugful! I stayed away till she quieted down, then I began going to see the woman again.

"But my wife was cannier than I knew. She was cognizant of all my moves. It was about then that I heard the white woman was going about with a pretty decent fellow in town, a man named Miller. A big, fine-looking chap who had fallen for her, head over heels. I asked her about him, and she told me she had decided to marry him. I went into a rage. I couldn't bear the thought of any fellow's getting her. I threatened all manner of things if she didn't give this chap the gate. She was frightened, she knew I was desperate. I needed her myself! She promised, and I left in a state of high dudgeon. What a rotten thing, her marrying some chap just because she didn't want to go on alone. Love's the only thing that gives people a right to marry. Marriage is too holy to desecrate by being used as a convenience. Would have made her no better than a woman of the streets. I told her so!

"But it was all taken out of my hands. My wife crept to the woman's house that night and killed her—killed her and carved her up horribly. Then she put up on the wall a crazy native sign that the woman was defiled, and she had killed her in vindication of her own wifehood. That was a lie—I'd never touched the white woman. She wouldn't even let me shake her hand. But it's being a lie didn't save her life. After committing her awful deed my wife killed herself. Came and stood before me, bragged of what she'd done, and drove the knife right through herself before my very eyes!

"I rushed to the woman's house to verify what my wife had said. The sight sickened me. I knew I was done for in that town. I had to get out, quick as God would let me. I hid on a boat, a filthy tramp steamer, for five killing days before I left port. Miller, the man who was to have married the white woman, swore to find me and kill me. Swore to make me confess to my rotten behavior, as he put it, and kill me with his hands

before those who heard my confession. But the boat left, and I got away safely. Even today, it makes me sick to think of what he'd have done to me if he'd caught me. But—he never got me."

HASTING'S voice was drowned in a deafening crash of thunder, and Burgensdorf rose in the firelight, his face the most awful mask of tragedy ever worn on a human head. His hands spread in the air like steel talons, and his voice came rasping like the voice of an infuriated demon, cutting through the rolling of the thunder, while the lightning played theatrically through the trees behind him.

"*But he's got you now!* You filthy, rotten, stinking excuse for a man! It's taken twenty years of tracking, shadowing and thinking. It's taken twenty years of determined, relentless mind pressure to bring you to the breaking point, so you'd spill the whole story—a story that shames a man for his own sex. But I've got you now! Stand up and take your medicine. And be mighty quick about it, or I'll jerk you up!"

Lorrimer and I could only stare, frozen into helpless, rigid statues, as Burgensdorf stood over Hasting like an avenging Nemesis. Hasting sprang to his feet, and his voice rose in a cowardly shriek of white-livered fear. A spurt of lightning lit his dilated eyes, and the thunder rolled like the drums of eternity.

"Keep your hands down!" Hasting shrieked crazily. "*Keep your hands down!* Burgensdorf—it wasn't *you!* Keep your hands down!"

"It was I!" Burgensdorf's voice rolled like the thunder overhead, and his hands rose steadily, fingers spread, twitching, like the hands of an iron Frankenstein. "And I'm going to kill you, here and now, with these. With these—see?" He reached his hard fingers toward Hasting, and Hasting gave a sickening yell and tried to leap over the fire. Burgensdorf caught him as easily as he'd have caught a frog, caught him with marvelous quickness and held him toward the fire, so that the smoldering flames lit up Hasting's ghastly face.

"Look at him—Lorrimer. Look at him—Case. This is the thing who wanted me to tell him what youth, innocence and cleanliness are. Well, I'll tell him! It's the last chance he'll ever have to hear.

"Youth! That's the thing that sings inside of us when there's nothing left to sing about. That's the thing that faces worse than death with a smile—and not a crooked smile, either—and goes straight on with its spirit undaunted. That's the thing that is a million years old and never dies!

"Innocence! That's the thing that walks untouched through the muck of the world and still believes in God and some kind of justice, sometime, somewhere, somehow. That's the thing that the filth it contacts can neither soil, lessen nor degrade. That's the thing that burns like a white fire in the soul, plainly, for all to see—and it never dies, either!

"Cleanliness! That's the thing that is too big to lie, or cheat, or steal. That's the thing that's too tolerant to see the dust on another's face, unless it can reach out to wipe away that same dust. That's the thing that holds itself above desecrating the secrets of another, that looks beyond the superficialities and seeks the truth—the truth which is beauty. Like the other two, it never dies.

"And she had 'em all. The woman his wife murdered and mutilated till she was only a grotesque and hideous mockery of a human corpse. She had 'em all! For which she was murdered by his wife." Burgensdorf's eyes, mad as all hell, glared at Lorrimer and me. We could neither move

nor speak. We were held in a vice of stark terror. "His holy, law-given mate; his pure undefiled girl-wife—'virginal as a young swan!' By God! I tell you I'm going to kill him, now. Watch me break his neck!"

Too quickly for the eye to follow, Burgensdorf's powerful fingers slipped from Hasting's shoulders. One hand caught at the writhing, fear-stricken victim's waist, the other caught viselike in the mat of Hasting's dry, tow-colored hair. With one swift movement Burgensdorf raised the other man high in the air, lifted him own knee and brought Hasting down across it. There was a sickening, dull snap, a wild, horrible scream, and Hasting went limp in Burgensdorf's arms. Burgensdorf stared down into that ghastly face with his insane eyes. Then he laughed. A laugh that made the gooseflesh rise all over my body. Lorrimer groaned and clapped his hands over his eyes.

"Dead! Are you dead? Good! That's the way we treat toads, and Gila monsters. That's the way we treat slimy things that crawl through the world oozing their filth over their fellow men. So—*finis!*"

Burgensdorf tossed Hasting's limp body into the fire and raised his clenched hands over his head, lifted his face to the raging sky and cried in a voice that must have reached Heaven: "God—I've done it! Done what I swore to do, twenty years ago. It isn't murder! Destiny—in my hands! The Law of Retribution—in my brain! Let the King of Hell come and get him!"

Now you may believe as you please. But I shall always believe that his God—whatever God that strange man had—I believe his God heard him. And answered. The fire was down. It had been dying for half an hour. It couldn't have burned up the carcass of a cat. But suddenly there was a blinding flash, a streak of blue lightning zigzagged straight from the angry blackness overhead, struck the old snag at the base of which we had built our fire, followed the snag down and played weirdly over the coals. There was a sizzling crash, a blinding light hung for a moment in the air, and the ether was filled with a sharp, acrid odor. Burgensdorf stood with his fists high over his head, facing that blinding flash, his features working in a wild exaltation. A mighty roll of thunder broke directly over us.

Then, as suddenly as it had come, it was gone. We stared at the embers of the campfire, unbelieving, shaken to the soul. *There remained no least sign of the thing that had been Hasting!*

Lorrimer sprang to his feet, emitting a choked scream, and began kicking insanely at the fire.

"My God, Burgy!" I cried hoarsely. "That's murder! You'll swing for it!" I watched Lorrimer, my eyes starting from my head, and the thunder began dying away overhead.

"First, they'll have to find a corpse," Burgensdorf responded levelly.

Lorrimer left off his silly kicking at the fire and stopped stock-still to stare at Burgensdorf. Burgy shook himself like a man coming out of a dream. The light of insanity died from his eyes, and he rubbed them with his fist, like a child. He looked at Lorrimer, then at me, around the fire, raised his eyebrows quizzically and asked in a casual, matter-of-fact tone: "Where's Hasting? Silly ass, he talked me to sleep."

Lorrimer and I stared the harder. The storm shot another flash of lightning into the trees behind Burgy, and Lorrimer said under his breath, "My God!"

Burgensdorf didn't hear him. He yawned, glanced around again,

and repeated, rather impatiently, "Where'd that ass Hasting go?"

"Why," I began shakily, thinking to set his memory working, "don't you recollect—he was telling us about something that happened—down in the tropics—some experience he'd had with a couple of women—and it reminded you of the time you were there——"

"Hell—what are you talking about?" Burgensdorf interrupted with a grin. "I was never in the tropics. My ghost was, though."

"Your *ghost!*" the exclamation was startled out of Lorrimer.

"Yeh, I guess you'd call it that. Or maybe it's the subconscious mind. Some people claim that's what it is. Lord knows, it's some part of the mind that goes on functioning when the conscious mind is on a vacation."

"What are you talking about?" Lorrimer interrupted impatiently.

"Yes, for God's sake, elucidate!" I added, staring at the fire behind Burgensdorf, fascinated.

"What's the matter with you poor dubs?" Burgensdorf's grin broadened. "Didn't you ever hear of amnesia? It attacked me once, oh—some twenty years ago. I just went into a funk one day. For two years I wandered all over the world. Some fellows told me they'd seen me down in the South Seas, and God knows where, going by the name of Miller. But I woke up in the U. S. about a hundred miles from where I first went off my nut. Everything in between was a perfect blank. Lost as completely as though I'd been buried all that time. It never did bother me again, though. Say, I'm yearning to hit the hay. Where's Hasting?"

"I—don't know," Lorrimer answered, steadied now, watching Burgensdorf closely. "Why?"

"Oh, I just wanted to apologize for going to sleep on him. I didn't mean to insult the poor fish. He antagonizes me, I don't know why. I always want to spit out something sarcastic every time he's around. But I didn't mean to really offend him, you know. I just got drowsy when he began his silly reminiscences, and before I knew it I'd dropped off to sleep. Gosh, what a storm! Glad it didn't rain and give us a soaking. Might rain yet, though. Hadn't we better turn in?"

"I'm not sleepy," I answered, trying to speak evenly. "But do as you please—you and Lorrimer."

"I'm not sleepy either," Lorrimer put in hastily. "I—I believe I'll sit up by the fire a bit with Case."

"Well, I for one am going to pound my ear. Sit up all night if you want to, but little Rollo needs his beauty sleep." Burgensdorf smothered another yawn, waving a genial salute as he turned toward the path leading to the lodge, half a mile beyond. "When Hasting shows up tell him I'm sorry I couldn't stay awake to listen."

For a long time after he disappeared Lorrimer and I sat and stared at each other in stupefied silence. Finally, Lorrimer cleared his throat.

"My God, Case, what'll we do?" he whispered.

"Can you keep your mouth shut?" I asked, in the same tone.

"Yes—I guess that's all we *can* do. But—they'll try to find Hasting, you know."

Yes—they tried to find him. They never did, of course. They never even found a charred bone. There was none to find. Lorrimer and I made sure of that. Not finding any corpse, there was never any talk of murder. Once in a while Burgensdorf used to voice the sentiment of the whole crowd: "Say, I wonder where Hasting went? Funny cuss, going away like that, with never a word to anybody!"

CATTLE of FUROS

By EVERIL WORRELL

"The next instant he was seized firmly and lifted from his feet."

FRANK ALISON awoke from strange dreams of a dark star on which lived green-faced men, who fed on slaves; and of a great Bird of Space that flew between the stars and carried on its back men of Earth as captives to this dark star, to be drained of their blood in the slave-pens of Furos—for such was the name of the dark star. And in his dreams was a woman, clad in red, who had been kidnaped from a moving train by one of the green-faced men—and the pathetic beauty of this red-clad figure brought tears of pity to his eyes.

The tears were real, for he wiped them away with his hand as he awoke. Thankful for the awakening, he raised himself on his arm and gazed out of his window on the smiling landscape. Then like a chill came the old horror. For it was not all a dream. Like a nightmare the remembrance of it haunted his days, and distorted caricatures of the grotesque happenings filled his nights. It was all true—the green-faced man from the dark star, who called himself Gorlog; the pathetic face of the girl in red; the other captives whom the green-faced man had brought to the top of Castle Rock that ill-omened night a year ago; the great Bird of Space that carried them away to feed the overlords of Furos. For he, Frank Alison, had himself been dragged from a Canadian Pacific train in the dead of night by the green-faced man from Furos; he had seen his fellow-captives placed among the feathers of the Bird of Space; and he had staggered down from Castle Rock in the gray light of dawn, clad in a suit of pajamas and a silk dressing gown.

Of these things he had tried—only once or twice—to tell the story; once to a friend, his best friend in his club, a man named Hallam. But the

story was one he could not tell. He had found that to attempt it was to meet strange glances, to be credited with possible madness. Yet he could not forget. He could not take up his old life in peace. For him, there was no peace—would never be peace or forgetting again.

The things that had happened to him were so stupendous, and their possible import so tremendous—why, the whole Earth should have been warned! And his thoughts turned in upon him so, that he paid for his silence by nights of nightmare horror, nights of insomnia when nothing could make him forget his conjecturings and sleep, days when he feared a slip of the tongue every time he opened his mouth, and when he could indulge in none of his normal pursuits.

And suddenly, twelve dragging months had slipped away, and it was August!

Alison looked at his calendar on the morning of the first, with a feeling of excitement. He had not realized that the mere coming of the anniversary of this time that had cut his life in two would so affect him. It was as though he had waited, desolately, through a lifetime or an eternity, for nothing—and suddenly a clock had struck. For two days he went about in a dream of expectation, which gave way to a strong impulse to be up and doing. Doing what? What, but one thing, was there to do in this month, so haunted with memories? What, but to go back to Castle Rock? He made a resolution—the first real resolution that had brought peace to his heart in the whole year. The twentieth of August should find him keeping vigil on the top of Castle Rock; and the twentieth of next August, and of every August so long as he should live. It was on the twentieth of August that the green-faced man had watched for the Bird of Space. Well, he would watch always on the twentieth of August—for the Bird of Space, or for the green-faced man. Either one, or both—and he would know what to do.

With a light step, and a feeling of purpose and anticipation that made him feel like his old self, Alison bought his ticket west. He outfitted himself in Chicago, getting a suitcase larger than his old one, and filling it with miscellaneous odds and ends. If he was crazy, he might as well be thorough about it; and he was making arrangements for a trip to Furos. If he never found a way of getting there, perhaps the time would come when he would spend his life behind bars for his foolishness, but these plans he was making now gave him back his faith in himself for the present. At least, this was action after the long months of inaction and introspection.

So he loaded the suitcase until he could hardly carry it. Tins of concentrated food went into it, dried milk powder, steero cubes, hardtack, corned beef and chocolate; there must be water on Furos, but there might be no food at all that he could eat. He shuddered, remembering the food of the overlords of the dark star. And then went out to buy a revolver, and plenty of ammunition for it. Toilet articles and all personal accessories he dispensed with, except for his razor and a tube of shaving soap. It was no part of his plan to come down from his vigil attracting general attention by a tramplike growth of whiskers, and besides, the razor might be as useful as the revolver. His thoughts turned toward Furos with a mighty impulse of longing, but with no love—except for the poor victims to whose defense he wished to go. As for the rest of that unlit habitation, his motives were not philanthropic. Obedient to a last afterthought, he visited the laboratory of a chemist friend and took away a large container marked with a skull

and crossbones. Inside was potassium cyanide enough to put a period to the life of every person on the train on which he afterward embarked, and he could have obtained the stuff of no one else in the world; but the chemist friend was an old college chum who did not even question him.

ALISON made no attempt to follow in detail the procedure of the green-faced man in getting to Castle Rock. The last stage of his journey he made in a second-hand flivver. He avoided the west face of the Rock. His intention was to appear on the summit on the night of the twentieth, and in the meantime to keep as much out of sight and as far from the scene of his captivity of a year ago as possible. He had his watch, but it would be hard to time his arrival definitely, and moreover, he did not know just how he wanted to time it. He finally decided that he would get himself and his suitcase to the top of the Rock soon after dark, and watch there through the night. That was what Gorlog, the green-faced man, had done; and if they two should encounter each other during the night his plans would be in the way of fruition.

His hands torn with climbing, his back strained with the weight of the suitcase, Alison arrived at the summit. His heart leaped with the force of the memories that assailed him. For a moment, the old terror clutched at his heart. He had forgotten the desolation, the utter loneliness of this spot. Of all places on the face of the Earth, in its uttermost wildernesses and farthest deserts, surely no more suitable place could be found for traffic with the sinister forces of an unseen, hostile world. One thinks of the Earth on which we live as a series of homes, of plotted countrysides, of crowded cities; with occasional possible excursions into undeveloped places, places of little account. Up here on the mesa, Alison thought of the Earth as a tiny point in space, a lonely sphere most of whose surface was desolate in spite of the far-flung network of human enterprize and human population. A sea of water separates Europe and America. True, but it can be crossed, and many are the lonely spots on either continent through which an invading horde could be poured. There has been much speculation on this point, but little on the other, which filled Alison's mind. A sea of space, of ether, of nothingness, divides the Earth from the other solid bodies which swing eternally on their separate courses. If it could be crossed by an invading horde, who could guess, or who surmise, the future of our planet?

Alison settled himself comfortably, his back against the suitcase. There would be no sleeping tonight. He was tired, but not worn out with drugs and imprisonment. He was healthily tired, but alert as he had never been alert in his whole life. He sought the red and white stars near which, he had been told, hung the invisible dark star Furos, and fixed his eyes on them. There would be hours of waiting.

A LONG time passed. Alison became aware that he was listening to something—some sound that had replaced the utter silence, and that yet had been in his ears now for some time. It was a little, he thought, like the soft slipping of sand and pebbles on a quiet beach where the waves themselves make no sound. But there was nothing of that sort on top of the mesa. There were sand and gravel, but no waves to stir them, and tonight no wind, as there had been no wind on that other night. With a strange feeling of uneasiness, he cast a hasty glance behind him. A few low rocks were scattered about him,

but there was not even a shadow the height of a man—not even the height of a man sitting down. Perhaps his nerves were running away with him.

There was desperation in Alison's heart, as he leaped to his feet. If he were crazy, he would be thorough. He would wait till the dawn, since he had come. But he would not try any longer to behave as though he were here on a reasonable, dignified expedition. He would pace the rock, run if he felt like it, in obedience to the wild restlessness that swayed him. He rebelled against the fate that had visited upon him, a sane and healthy man, an experience that swayed his whole life, a memory of the truth of which there was no proof.

And, suddenly, his hasty footsteps were arrested, and he stiffened into an attitude of horror. In his careless pacing, he had all but trod upon a serpent!

His breath coming fast, goose-flesh rising upon him, his eyeballs staring, he stood still and looked at the thing lying before him in the half-light.

A serpent? Yes, but of a size associated with South American jungles, or with nightmares. And yet not for a moment did Alison doubt the evidence of his senses now. This thing before him was real—real enough, although it lay half-uncoiled in the dim shadows, so that it was no wonder he had almost fallen over it. One step more, and he would probably now be crushed and mangled, and perhaps poisoned with snake venom besides.

Carefully, he took a half-step backward. His impulse had been to avoid sudden motion, when, indeed, he was capable of motion. There had been a few moments when he had been motionless because he could not move. There was no sign of life from the thing before him, and he continued to retreat. He reached his suitcase, and lifted it. And then, suddenly, he let it fall, as a sibilant hiss reached his ears. Another move on his part, and the serpent moved, rearing and falling, and rolling awkwardly toward him. The thing seemed clumsy, as though it were a little torpid—the idea of South American jungles persisted in Alison's mind. But it moved fast enough, and somehow there ensued a dialogue of motion between the two, in which it was made clear to Alison that much or rapid movement on his part, or anything that might be construed as flight, was the signal for a menace from the enormous snake. Twice it glided in front of him; twice it reared as though to strike him; and once it circled and undulated around him, until Alison could all but feel its coils crushing and strangling him.

In the end, he sat down quietly on his suitcase. At least, there was something to wait for now. The monster might tire and go away. It might lose interest, so that he could get away. It might attack—that was not a pleasant thought. Rather late in the day, Alison knew that if his revolver were to do him any good under any circumstances, it should have been in his pocket and not in his suitcase; but it was in his suitcase, and Alison's foe had shown an aversion to his handling the suitcase, possibly sensing that it might be used as a weapon.

Mercifully, this grim vigil did not last long. Alison's eyes were on the serpent, now, and not upon the heavens. Suddenly, a long, pendulous head was upreared—not toward Alison this time, but pointing steadily in an oblique direction, toward the south! Instinctively, Alison whirled, following the direction of its gaze.

At first he saw nothing but the star-strewn sky. Then a small black shadow—a bird was gliding downward through the night, clear-cut and black against the starlit sky. A small bird, wings spread motionless. A small bird, growing larger. Larger

and larger, and changing contour as it drew above the Rock.

Alison's heart leaped with joy and hope; beyond the highest anticipation of his life, this moment's thrill! The thing lying coiled on the Rock near by was forgotten. Alison was master of himself again, and at peace with himself. He was no incipient lunatic. Tonight he was wide-awake and in his full senses, and this was the Bird—the Bird of Space!

His mind worked clearly and rapidly. Even though his fears were allayed, even though life had again cohesion and meaning, his mission was already partly thwarted. He might achieve more, after long delay. He dared to hope, now, that on each twentieth of August, the Bird of Space touched on this point in its year-long pilgrimage of space. That there was some cycle of time in its wanderings that strangely brought it here, once in each earthly year! It was strange enough, but he had reason now to think that it was true. Then, another year, perhaps with equal luck he could dare attempt to cling to it, to risk life on its long flight. But on this trip, his plans had hinged partly on the green-faced man. Had he found him, too, he had hoped that he would be willing to facilitate his flight with him; the ogres of Furos would be glad of one more victim. That was why his revolver had been packed away; he had depended on the appearance and cooperation of the piratical overlord of Furos. True, he had counted the seeing of the celestial visitant whose wide-flung pinions now cut off the starlight as an end in itself; he still did so. But this was only for the sake of verifying his old memory, and bringing peace to his soul. Dare to lay hold on the Bird, to clamber among its feathers, to cling to it, to hope that it would go to Furos with him—he might have dreamed of such a thing, if he had dared to make more complete preparations. He might devise a portable oxygen tank, a thermal equipment which would give a one in a hundred chance of his surviving the trip through space. He might dare to take the one in a hundred chance alone—a mad, desperate thing to do, a reckless invitation to Death!

But he had made no such arrangement, no such plans. Indeed, there had been no time for such elaborate preparation since he had hurriedly determined to come thus far. Without the presence of the merciless captor who had been so anxious to make the journey safe for him before, the suitcase full of futile equipment was less than useless. As well leave it here, before he started the downward climb.

GENTLY, as a cloud settles against a mountain slope, the mighty pinions hovered low and lower. Softly as a bit of thistledown, the immense bulk of the Bird came to rest on Castle Rock—not so near to Alison, this time, that he had any fear. He had chosen his position carefully, and it was near the sheer face of the cliff, and a little distance from that grooved-out hollow in which he had lain before. In his encounter with the giant snake he would have forgotten to think of this, but since he had not been allowed to go far from his suitcase and his original position, that matter had taken care of itself. So there was a moment in which he stood, quite safe and calm, regarding the Bird whose mere existence meant so much to him.

The next instant he was seized firmly and lifted from his feet.

Twisting his head around and suppressing an inclination to cry out with horror, Alison engaged in a silent struggle. The serpent, which he had forgotten, had crept up to him, had reared itself upward to the height of a man, and was holding him

in the grip of its tail. Snake, monster, dragon—whatever it was, it was a thing no mortal man could contend with successfully. When he had fought it to the point of exhaustion, the thing had not even loosened its hold. Neither had it injured him, seeming content to hold him, and to do battle only in self-defense.

Suddenly, Alison was conscious that he was being drawn toward the Bird.

He was being raised through the air, pulled and pushed, dragged through a dark, fluffy mass of something that reminded him of enormous ostrich plumes. And among them he came to rest. He was reclining, by no volition of his own, among the feathers of the Bird of Space.

Reaching his hand upward, he was conscious that the thick, soft plumage which surrounded him as softly as though he had been packed in cotton wool, was a sort of down lying close to the body of the Bird. There were feathers above this, feathers something like the feathers of the birds of Earth—light, strong, long and not very flexible.

He had not long to conjecture, before calm thought gave way to a torrent of excited feeling. The great Bird upon which he reposed so securely was moving; stirring, jerking a little upward, as though getting to its feet; moving forward, swiftly, throbbing with life and motion—rising, falling, beating its way upward—flying upward from the Earth, out into the desert spaces of the night!

Into the night of space, that held a swift death for him.

Moments passed. A thrill of intense cold, cold more absolute, more piercing and blood-freezing than anything he had ever dreamed of, shot through him. Among the soft, downy feathers of the under-plumage, there had been warmth. The warmth was streaming away like water from a sieve hurled swiftly through the air. Alison could feel it go. He burrowed more deeply into the feathers, feeling with his clutching hands the odd, scaly texture of the skin beneath. Perhaps that was the secret of the Bird's endurance—a skin of unknown texture, that did not radiate, beneath the luxuriant plumage. It did not matter—nothing mattered but the deadly cold.

Yes, there was something else that mattered. Alison could hardly breathe. He panted and gasped for air, and felt blood gush from his nostrils and freeze instantly upon his face. He caught a glimpse of the sky above him, a bitter black, blacker than any sky he had ever seen, with steady, baleful points of brilliant white and colored fires that mocked him—the stars toward which his unknowing corpse would speed—how long?

It was the end. And even as consciousness forsook him, he had the unhappy knowledge of another horror added to his passing, as the head of the serpent he had thought to have escaped undulated toward him, the eyes shining in the darkness.

Upon a dark shore stood a watch-tower. Like an evil, torpid, unwinking eye a dull red oval set high up in its wall made the surrounding darkness visible.

A tideless sea that stretched away to an unseen horizon; a stagnant-smelling ooze of mud where the black water met the black earth, and higher up the low slope a straggling growth of sickly, whitish vegetation; a group of seven gathered near the water's edge—seven shapes like men that yet were not like men in the manner of their moving and standing, that spoke together in no tongue ever heard by human ears upon a sunlit planet; on these things the lurid glow beat dully.

After a while, the lifeless waters moved sluggishly. Small waves, waves made heavy because in them mud mingled with water, pushed their way inshore. The red light touched dimly something seaward, and by degrees an oddly shaped dark boat detached itself from the gloom. A small boat with a silent motor grounded softly, and a figure resembling the figures of the seven watchers landed, throwing out several heavy objects. One of these moaned as it hit the muddy bank, and the seven immediately busied themselves about it. The thing was large, long and heavy, and not what it appeared to be at first. For after a short fumbling, and the casting off of something that enfolded it, it became recognizable in the dull red glare—a man.

He lay upon his back, his head turned to one side, his eyelids tightly closed, his limbs inert—the picture of a peaceful sleeper. And around him moved the unwholesome figures, eight of them now. Soon several of these busied themselves with the several things that had been thrown upon the muddy bank. These were bundled together and carried toward the dark tower. A moment later, the sleeping man was lifted to a sort of stretcher, and borne by two toward, and into, the dark tower. The door that opened to receive them showed a fainter glow, as though the interior were lit only indirectly by the source of the light that streamed through the oval window. It closed instantly, and the sounds of the murmuring voices of the eight were lost. Outside the tower were only the shrouding darkness, the lifeless waters and the sad land, and the dismal light that made them visible—and silence. Until the silence was shattered by a sound that came strangely in this setting, and yet accorded with it well: a woman's wail.

Alison's watch was a great comfort to him, though it did not aid him in marking off the time that had elapsed since he began his journey from the top of Castle Rock. Nor could he in any way compute it.

He had wakened within the dim-lit tower, and his first feeling had been one of self-disgust. It seemed that in all his dealings with Furos and the inhabitants of Furos, his chief characteristic was to lapse into unconsciousness. Of course he was unfair to himself. The swoon in which he had passed the journey had been induced by the near approach of death, and prolonged, as on the former memorable occasion, by the drugs of Gorlog, the green-faced man, who had also been the means of saving his life. He had counted on the co-operation of Gorlog to aid him in reaching Furos—and he had had it. Gorlog had shown all his former willingness to explain detail. Glad to have his interpreter back, he had spent what amounted to nearly a week by Alison's watch, sitting beside him in the little prison room in the watch-tower, explaining many things to him, and also forcing into his head a working knowledge of the language of Furos. Alison had been restored to his original place in the plans of Gorlog. He was a prisoner, and under ultimate sentence of death. But there seemed to be a number of ways in which he was expected to be of use before he shared in its entirety the fate of other captives. He was a sort of prisoner of war, accorded consideration and honors.

In the corner of the little prison chamber were piled several bulky objects. These Alison had explored before the first visit of Gorlog. Among them was his suitcase. But there were two other things there that startled him inexpressibly, and for a while held his entire thought and wonderment. These were two enormous snake-skins, either one of which

might have been taken from the monster reptile with which he had done battle on the Rock, and whose hideous head had made his last fainting moments of consciousness more grotesquely horrible than they would otherwise have been.

Had he mysteriously survived the journey and been deposited on the distant dark star, and had there been not one but two serpents, both of which had been killed by the men of Furos?

Gorlog set him right at once, when he appeared. He himself, Gorlog, had worn one of the snake-skins, and Alison had made most of the journey in the other. Such skins, prepared by a process Alison did not understand, were the thermal equipment which preserved Gorlog and his various captives from the cold of interstellar space. An oxygen equipment was stored in the head, an equipment small and efficient beyond anything Alison could have dreamed possible. The eye-holes were fitted with a transparent substance, clear like glass, but very flexible, through which Gorlog looked as through his own eyes. And, what was strangest of all to Alison at first, although not strange on second thought, was the manner in which Gorlog had possessed himself of his awkward covering, conformed to it in his movements, so that beyond a little apparent sluggishness he had presented the exact appearance of a snake. Of course, the strange, rubbery suppleness of his body was the cause of this. And, indeed, Alison was not long in surmising that the men of Furos were as closely related to a reptilian form of life as the men of Earth are related to the apes. He learned that the slimy mud which thickly bordered the watery portions of the star was infested with reptiles of which the people of Furos went in terror, as was the water itself. If, then, a high intelligence could be imagined to have occurred in a physical development that was something between reptile and simian, the type of man living on Furos might be considered accounted for: beings with the intellect of men, and the bodies and moral sense of an animal between a reptile and an ape, living on the murky shores of a reptile-infested sea, under a lightless sky—for the air was always filled with a heavy vapor which cut off the stars.

These things weighed heavily on Alison's imagination. But for one thing, it would have been easy to give up all hope, and to sink supine before whatever fate had in store. But for one thing, it would be easy to admit that he had made a ghastly mistake, and there was nothing left but expiation. Before he had come here, he realized now that he had had wild fancies. He had seen himself defying the overlords of Furos in a body, conquering them or reforming them, or at the worst dying in a brave defiance —just what, he did not know, but he had seen himself in a heroic rôle. He certainly had not seen himself shut up endlessly, like a wild animal in a cage or a dog in a kennel—or a calf or a pig waiting for market! He shuddered in a sudden realization. But for one thing, he would call himself a fool, treat himself to a pinch of the potassium cyanide in his suitcase—they had taken away his gun, as he might have foreseen—and die. But for one thing——

A DOOR opened softly in the metal wall of his prison, and the One Thing stood before him. To Alison, the dusky, lurid glow became a soft rosy light, like the light of rose-shaded candles in a quiet room. The grim walls that had reminded him of his captivity took on something of beauty, and something of kindliness, since they shut out a dismal world, and shut in—two.

It was only a girl, or rather the

shadow of what had been a girl, that made the change: his fellow prisoner-of-honor, the one other of all the prisoners from Earth to escape the common fate. It was his girl in red, the girl for whom he had come here.

She was still in red. The red she had worn inside Castle Rock had been a dainty, beautiful dress on that fatal night on the train. It was now a pitiful garment of rags. It had been mended with a gluelike substance, and torn again in many places, and it had been washed to doubtful advantage many times—to doubtful advantage, because the water which the people used was piped from the sea, and, being taken from near the shore, was muddy. This was not because means could not easily have been devised for obtaining pure water, or purifying the water used; it was simply because the people of Furos were satisfied to drink and use muddy water. In fact, like the reptiles they resembled, they seemed to prefer it. Alison had seen them bathing in the mud.

Hitherto when he had seen the girl —Irene, as now he called her—he had not noticed this dress, being filled with such pity at the sight of her pallor and thinness, and the hollows around her eyes, that he had no thought for other things. Today he spoke of it.

"Couldn't they give you some of their slouchy clothes to wear—that would be more comfortable? Haven't they that much decency? Perhaps I might get Gorlog to do something about it."

He had noticed before how she started at the name of Gorlog. Now her hands went out to him in a quick protest. It occurred to him that it was the start of a gesture of supplication, which she had probably learned during her captivity on Furos. Many times she must have sobbed out her heart in futile pleading.

"Never mention me to Gorlog. Never let him know you care for me. Do you not know why he has left this door open, not caring to keep us apart? It is because he seeks to please me with a companionship which may while away the hours, but which yet will mean nothing much to me. I have made him think that I dislike you, but that I would question you about—the Earth."

Her voice broke on the word. Small wonder!

"As for this dress—they do not make clothes like this for the women of Furos. Science is theirs, but art is beyond them. And so Gorlog must see me in this. I am beautiful to him —in this."

Even to Alison, who loved her, Irene was no longer beautiful. She was too worn, too scared, too haggard. And the dress, with one foolish pink rosebud clinging to the shoulder! A sudden thought struck him.

"For God's sake, Irene! You have never told me why he keeps you here. What does he intend? I don't know what he means to do with me; but you—do you mean that that beast is —fond—of you?"

She bent her head in desolate assent.

"In his way."

"At least, then, you are not in danger of being treated as the others are treated—before I find a way for us to escape."

"Dear friend, you do not yet understand the ways of Furos."

There was a silence, while Alison waited for more.

"I am—so treated—now. On Furos, the overlords have a caste to consider, besides which the classes of Earth—even the castes of India—are nothing. There is no love-making between an overlord of Furos and a woman not of his caste. I have that to thank God for. But when an overlord of Furos looks with favor upon a woman who is one of the Cattle of

Furos—the slaves—or upon a woman of Earth, who has become one of the Cattle of Furos—she is his slave alone, as the others are slaves——"

There was a long, hushed interval.

The light that had been like the light of rose-shaded candles was again the light of the Tower of Furos. It was the color of blood, and baleful as the fires of hell. Alison walked the floor. At last, with a great effort, he spoke.

"I know, of course, what you mean. I think I know. Then when he visits you——"

"Yes, that is what I mean. Like the vampire stories. That is why I am so weak. That is why——"

She extended her arm. The wrist was bandaged.

"And how long——?"

"Not long. He will not keep me alive long. He has made me sing for him, and I am too weak to sing now. My dear—you have told me why you came here. You should not have come. Within a week, perhaps it will be all over for me."

Alison took her in his arms and kissed her for the first time.

After a while, she went back through the narrow doorway, to rest; and he was left alone.

USUALLY, when he was solitary, the hours passed soundlessly as hours spent within a tomb. Alison had come to connect nearly all natural phenomena with sunlight, as we know natural phenomena. Since Furos had no encircling planet, there were no tides; that accounted for the stagnation of the water. There were also no winds, no calm and storm, no rainfall. As water and land mingled for a long way in mud, so air and water seemed to mingle. A slow process of evaporation went on constantly, and at the same time a slow process of precipitation. The air was thick and heavy, murky with fog and canopied with clouds which hovered endlessly. But little of this could be seen by Alison, because of the darkness. Lights on Furos were used as signals, as in the case of the watch-tower; and even they were dim, because the phosphorescent eyes which found light in darkness could not easily endure a strong illumination.

Tonight, however (it was that period of the twenty-four hours of darkness that Alison called night) there was a distant booming in the air. Alison had learned that off to the inland there lay a great city; and the sound seemed to come from that direction. Opposite the doorway that led from his prison to the outside world, a window of the transparent fabric which took the place of glass was set into the wall. Many times Alison had pressed his face against the fabric, which seemed tough and unbreakable, and stared into the empty, meaningless blackness. He did this now, expecting to see nothing.

A moment more, and his heart leaped with excitement. At least, for the first time, there was something to see!

Near the tower, the pale vegetation stood out with some distinctness, illumined by faint rays of vari-colored light. Farther away, a great plain swept gradually upward toward the source of the light, which was the towered city of which he had heard.

And it was a city indeed! Some twenty miles distant, Alison guessed; and yet with a skyline flung against the gloomy, vaporous sky, that reached far up toward the zenith. The Furians built high. And tonight must be a gala night, a night of much excitement, since from perhaps a hundred towers issued the soft illumination. Light and color, used sparingly here, had always meaning.

Absorbed in the strange vision, he failed to note the constant augmenting of the booming sound that had first held his attention, until the door

behind him was flung violently open. He turned swiftly, to behold Gorlog.

"To the city! To the Council! It is the time when we have need of you. Not as I had planned, we need you, but for our very salvation. All is ruin—ruin!"

Alison had wondered if the art of flying had been mastered here. He found the answer to the question in the luxuriant plane into which he was hustled. An unseen pilot directed their course toward the distant towers, which loomed instant by instant higher and nearer. As they went, Gorlog talked.

"Know, Interpreter, that the Council is composed of the eight wise men of Furos. We are the rulers of slaves and overlords alike, the lords of life and death and the directors of destiny. Only we are taught the full knowledge of the science of Furos, whence is our power. Our number is limited, always, to eight.

"You know how, and why, we have brought Earthlings here, to add to our slaves. We have found the Earthlings good. Their service is good, their endurance, their nerve—their blood and their flesh are good. But the number of captives we could secure, bearing them here by the help of the Bird of Space, is small.

"So, through the years, have we worked to perfect an interstellar ship, that we might sail to Earth, or to other stars or planets, at our will; and not once or twice in a long cycle of time, but as often as we liked. We have perfected such a ship, we eight, and we alone have the secret of it!

"Now, a thing has happened. Of us eight, one man is a fool. Of our slaves, who work for us and nourish us with their flesh and blood as is suitable and ordained for slaves of inferior caste and breeding, many are fools since the coming of the Earthlings. In yonder city, our capital city of Gooloom, all is chaos because of the teachings of the Earthlings and the rebellion of the slaves. Even now one of the Council lies quiet in the deepest room of his dwelling, because of a blow on the head inflicted by a slave: resting until the hour of Council meeting.

"And the Councilor who is a fool, he has established a religion. The religion of the worship of the Bird of Space! We of the Council, we have permitted no religion on Furos. The slaves have shown tendencies to set up such things, weaving fancies to forget their wretchedness. We have not permitted it, but this Councilor who is a fool, he has united them.

"And this Councilor, he has one of the instruments which destroy matter by disintegrating it—instruments which are known only to the Council, which may not be even talked of to any other man or woman on Furos. He can destroy with it, even while we seek to destroy him. He is in hiding but we can not hide the things he may destroy—our capitol, our Council building, our underground factories, our interstellar ship.

"I meant to hold you, guarding you carefully, until we had brought a goodly colony from Earth. Now I have need of you. You shall stand before the Council and swear our oath of fealty. You shall go with me before the Earthling who has incited the slaves, and treat with him that there be no more rebellion. And if you fail, you shall be tortured in ways you know not of.

"But whether you succeed or fail, you shall not be slain. For there is a thing that must be done, which none of us dare do because of fear of the vengeance of the Councilor who is a fool, and who has established his religion.

"They threaten the destruction of the interstellar ship on which hangs the future of Furos—a great future of conquest! They threaten this, because they believe—the fools!—that

only the great Bird should be allowed to sail through space!

"To end this talk, the Bird must be slain. We have no more need of him. And you, Earthling, must slay him. For if they kill you in vengeance, it matters not."

"It matters not." How typically Furian!

The airship was gliding among the towers of Gooloom. Gorlog's words had flashed through Alison's brain like lightnings.

"The Bird! Kill the Bird of Space! Why is that necessary?" he asked, stupidly.

"I tell you, they hold him as a sacred thing. They oppose conquest. Having now the secret of interstellar travel, we need him not. Let him die. Without him, we can enslave your Earth—perhaps many other worlds.

"He shall die—not by our methods, that his death may be avenged upon us, but by you—base-born of Earth."

Suddenly, a doubtful ray of light shot through the chaos of Alison's mind. The Bird of Space he had thought never to see again. At least, he would be allowed to approach once more the mysterious being that had been since time unknown a link between Furos and the Earth.

"How long before the Bird returns?" He asked the question with a quickening of anticipation.

"He has not gone. On Earth I told you, the Wise Men of Furos befriended the Bird. No farther in these skies he goes, but rests upon a high place raised above the waters by our builders, then returns toward the place from which he comes, far in the regions beyond the Earth. And for a few moments in his flight each way, he stops upon the Earth, perhaps on other stars and planets. The skies in which he is no alien, but at home, are far beyond our guessing. He has served us well in his long voyages. But he will never return to those far places that are his home."

"Treacherous—devilish!"

Alison murmured the words below his breath. His heart was full of sympathy. There was something of benevolence about the great traveler of space that had kindly borne on its pinions the sly men of Furos and whatever freight it had been loaded with. There were a grandeur and a mystery, too, which made him understand why the one Councilor who was a fool, an anachronism on Furos who indulged in fine feelings and poetic thoughts, had come to hold the Bird in reverence.

But there was little time for philosophizing; and moreover, Alison's heart was heavy with dread. Was his pathway already diverged from Irene's? Would he ever win back to her in her despair?

He was unloaded on a landing stage and rushed down a spiral stairway; across a street along which vehicles seemed to pass suspended by wires; down another stairway and into a large room.

"The headquarters of the rebels!" Alison thought excitedly.

A sickly blue light filled the room, proceeding from a bowl full of liquid, and resembling phosphorescence, which perhaps it was. By it, Alison saw strange things.

The room was packed with the slaves of Furos—the same simian-reptilian type as the overlords, but made infinitely more repulsive by their miserable condition. Many were the bandaged wrists—Alison knew what that meant. Blood had been drained from these poor victims to furnish tidbits for the ghoulish lords of Furos. Yet every phosphorescent pair of eyes was turned upon one man, and in every pair of eyes there shone a strange light—the light of hope that had been an unknown thing through countless generations.

Alison turned his eyes upon the man who held the gaze of all, even

through the distraction of the newcomers.

He gasped. And small wonder.

The central figure of that room was one of the captives from Earth. He wore a uniform, and service stripes. His face was gaunt and pallid, his wrist wore a bandage, and he swayed where he stood. But upon his breast was pinned a large badge, and on it was printed clearly:

John Northrup
First President
of the Republic
of Furos.

John Northrup was an American ace who had seen service in France. Having seen him once, Alison remembered the face before him in spite of its emaciation. He thought quickly, and then spoke rapidly in French—a language Gorlog did not know.

"Pretend to capitulate. I am ordered to kill the Bird of Space. I shall pretend to agree—and try to escape. If you and the others can get there—where the Bird is, I don't know where—but if you can, come. It may mean escape, even if it is death also."

"Can't make it, brother. I'll go on with what I'm starting here. But I'm for you."

Alison's arm was being crushed in the grip of Gorlog's powerful, rubbery fingers.

"We were comrades in France," he said in English. "Northrup uses his influence against the uprising for my sake. I'll take your oath of allegiance to the Council, and, if I can, I'll kill the Bird of Space."

"I will do as he asks," Northrup confirmed in English.

"You can kill him," said Gorlog grimly, producing Alison's revolver. "He will suspect no harm. You shall climb upon him and reach his head—and shoot through one of his eyes."

Alison shuddered. Suppose they were to compel him to do just that? He would almost as lief kill a trusting friend. He felt no trace of superstition concerning the Bird of Space, but somehow he, too, held it in awe. What things had it seen in its journeyings? What did it know of the secrets of the universe? And what if the God in Whom the men of his own planet believed, of Whom the men of Furos had never heard, had spoken to the heart of the one Councilor who was not like the others, moving him to halt the projected destruction of the Earth?

Strange thoughts and strange conjectures were in Alison's mind. What chance was there that the one Councilor and the rebellious slaves might achieve their republic, and that the Earth might be saved from attack? So far as he could see, while the seven lived, there was no chance. The slaves held meetings, and there were no soldiers in the streets. The seven did not fight with such crude weapons. No; but once let them be assured of the necessity and they would safeguard their rule by the ruthless destruction of many millions. They were holding their thunderbolt in leash; the weapon to which Gorlog had referred; the weapon that reduced whatever it was focused upon to nothingness—to "an invisible vibration." Long ago, in his captivity in the cave, Gorlog had illustrated this to him, destroying sections of the granite rock by slipping a tiny lever. And Alison had not forgotten. He would wager his life that as soon as the matter of killing the Bird of Space was attended to, Northrup's life would last but a little time; probably a large number of slaves would go with him, as an object lesson. Only, there was the one enemy Councilor who was in hiding, and who also possessed one of these weapons.

He knitted his brow, trying to puzzle it out. The wholesale destruction

of Furos? If he could not escape, he would gladly welcome that.

They were before the Council. Before seven solemn, loathsome "Wise Men" with green faces, Alison took a strange oath that he tried to forget during the saying. It was a gruesome thing, that oath, and the penalties called down for its breaking were not nice.

They were in the airship once more—Alison, Gorlog and the other six. They went swiftly, the strange skyline of Gooloom dropping away behind them. The booming sound Alison had heard before arose again, and died swiftly. He surmised now that it was a demonstration which the slaves were making, and which Northrup this time had stopped quickly. He was helping him, giving him his chance. A very little chance, and hardly worth the giving.

They reached the red-lit prison tower. Alison suddenly read a new thing in the faces of the seven. If he killed the Bird, or if he did not, he would never tell the story of this night on Furos. His sands were running out. To him would be imputed the killing, with his own weapon; but he would not be needed to corroborate the story. That "dead men tell no tales" was known well on the dark star.

"This is a dangerous mission," he pleaded. "Give me a moment alone with the girl from Earth. I may never speak to an Earthling again."

"While the boat is prepared," consented Gorlog.

The seven went out.

It was more than he had hoped. He tapped on the door, and Irene glided in. Swiftly he told her of the night's events and his all but hopeless plan.

"Try to follow us and stow away in the boat. If you think there's no use at all, I won't go. I'll refuse them here, and let them do their worst."

"Go! Promise me that you will try to escape!" Irene caught his arm frantically. "They will torture and kill you before my eyes, and you can spare me that. I *have* a plan."

Her words were almost unintelligible in her haste, as sliding footsteps were audible in the mud outside.

"If I can call back some of my old strength, there is a chance. I will try to follow you. We may escape to die together, out there away from these monsters. We may even escape—to live. Trust me, and go."

She glided through the door.

Alison took a step after her, and wheeled suddenly. Something that had been missing from his plan had slipped into place in his mind. He rushed to the corner of the room and worked frantically at his suitcase. After a moment, he crammed a stoppered bottle of milk powder into his pocket, and snatched the tin of steero cubes, beginning to suck one as the door opened suddenly and the seven entered. One of the seven snatched at the tin of steero cubes, helping himself. They were all munching as they went out, including Gorlog. Alison had expected that. The overlords of Furos prized but one food—but they were greedy and experimental and eager to possess themselves of anything that might be a special treat.

Alison had come, now, to the point beyond which he could do nothing, save yield to his grim captors and hope for a chance—a chance the very nature of which was indistinct in his imaginings. He was marched between a double file of the grotesque, dimly seen figures, down toward the waterside. There lay a boat—the boat that had been but now prepared for use. This much he had expected, for he knew that he had been brought to this shore in a boat, unconscious. It was the same boat, lying low in the

water, but with a tall prow in front. His feet sank deep and deeper in the sucking mud, and drew up, as did the feet of the seven, with a sound that was somehow horrible to him, as was the sound made by the rubbery lips around him, each sucking upon a steero cube. The cubes had evidently been a gustatorial success, but Alison's stomach turned.

Once, something moved under his shrinking foot, deep down, as though under a foot or so of the slimy mud. Alison leaped forward a pace. They had reached the boat, and it was with gratitude that he climbed within it and took an indicated seat in the stern. Instantly he strained his eyes, looking to see whether, in the leisurely embarking, Irene might have gained the boat, might have found a corner in which to hide away. There was a dim light high in the prow, which shone in all directions, and by its light he could see that there was no chance of that. In the boat, which somehow, to his fancy, resembled a hearse with the prow of a gondola, there were himself and the seven, one of whom had assumed charge of the motor. There was no trace of Irene, and no place in which she could be hidden.

The boat moved slowly in the sluggish water, which sucked at its sides as the mud had sucked and clutched at Alison's unwilling feet. They were on their way—on their way to the adventure that awaited him alone, and which had lost its point for him.

His eyes were hot with tears. Looking back, he saw dimly that the tower door had been left open. But no girlish form came through.

In the dull glare on the dark waters, he saw great reptiles moving—the deadly reptiles that infested these waters, and that, when slain, furnished the snake skins in which one might live in space. He thought of the two that had lain in his prison chamber in the tower since he had been brought there by Gorlog, but it did not matter now that he had had no means of taking them, or of smuggling them within the boat. It did not matter that he had no hope of living, since Irene had been left behind. He did not want to live.

For perhaps an hour they slid through the dark, foul waters. Their speed was low, their way was tortuous. Whether this was necessitated by shoals, high-lying bars of mud, or by the thickness of the unwholesome inmates of the water, he could not know. He knew that their goal was the high structure which had been built, like a solid tower, upon an island, and that many steps led to the top—and that on the top brooded the Bird of Space. So much, Gorlog had told him. He wondered whether he would be suffered to mount upon the Bird alone, or whether he would be dragged to his task, to its very fulfilment, by Gorlog! Perhaps the former, since it must be a dangerous thing to be upon the back of the monstrous Bird in its death agonies. Much had depended on this point, and connected with it, somehow, was the one chance he had vaguely hoped for.

He became conscious of a sound like the wail of a distant, rising, falling wind. Somewhere, off to the left in the blackness, something was making the sound. And it was not the wind. Not the wind, for there were no clean, wholesome stirrings of the air on Furos. The moaning grew louder—yes, that was what it was. Moaning and wailing, grievous sounds coming through the eternal night, and coming nearer. Surely, not so far away, there lay a blacker blot of darkness, low and long—an island! Their course did not turn toward it, and Alison was glad. For the first time, he asked a question, and Gorlog answered shortly.

"Slave pens. That they may live as long as possible, we send them here from the mainland when they are too weak for service, and their blood is not good to drink, nor are they themselves fit to be killed for the market. And very careful must we be that there are no weapons on the island of the slave pens, or many would cheat the market. The Earthlings you did not see are—there."

The dismal sound drew behind, and still the gondola prow with its high, dim light breasted slowly the dark waters. Alison, sick with disgust, leaned back in the stern.

More than anything else in this world of horrors unspeakable, this had driven home to him the nature of the captivity of Furos. Irene's story had wrung his heart—yet, now, he pictured her meeting the end she had anticipated as coming soon—meeting it surely, but only, perhaps, after experiencing such horrors as even she had not yet dreamed of. Days and nights—perhaps weeks and months—in this dreary antechamber to hell!

And then his heart gave a frantic bound. His hand, restlessly moving on the gunwale, had touched a soft human hand, a hand attached to a delicate wrist—Irene's, he would swear upon his soul!

Then Irene was clinging to the boat, trailing her frail body through the death-infested water!

His hand closed over the small, deadly cold one, but with the supreme effort of his life, he made no other move. She had gotten thus far—he must not interfere. Better, perhaps, to be the prey of the evil things of the sea of Furos, than of the half-human monsters of the land.

After an eternity—Alison's lip was bleeding, where he had clenched it between his teeth in futile anguish—the boat grounded. Another muddy shore. He dared not turn his head. Before they reached the land, Irene's hand had slipped from his. Why? She might have been torn from her grip on the gunwale by one of the monsters of the deep. She might—horrible thought!—have been seized and torn away before—leaving her dead hand in his grasp. He forced himself to move forward steadily, to control his thoughts.

There were steps to mount—many, as in a nightmare. They were climbing the structure built by the builders of Furos, to the high, open place where rested the Bird of Space. His feet lagged heavily in his doubt and uncertainty. His mind centered on one thing—the deadly coldness of the little hand he had held so long. The chill of the dark waters, or the chill of death?

It was the top at last. And straight ahead, more indistinct than on the top of Castle Rock, where the light of a starlit night of Earth made its graceful outline clearly visible, loomed the gigantic shape of the great Bird of Space. At rest, as it had rested—on what other stars?—between the periods of its far voyaging. For a moment, Alison forgot all other feeling in a wave of awe and wonder.

Whatever happened now, this was doubtless the end of his life. And, at the end, he was in the presence of mystery.

Gorlog's voice: "If you use this on one of *us*, the others are here!" And his revolver was pressed into his hand.

Awkwardly, clinging to the soft, remembered plumage, he mounted the great Bird that suffered him trustingly. He moved slowly, to give Irene time. If, indeed, she still lived.

As he reached the back of the Bird, he let the bottle in his pocket roll to the ground, and heard an exclamation of interest. He smiled grimly in the darkness.

"Hurry! Climb to his head! And shoot."

For the last time, his eyes searched

desperately. No! There was no slight figure struggling toward him and the Bird. Only the seven.

ALISON took firm hold of the Bird's plumage and fired—toward, but not at, the great, graceful head that loomed against the dim-lit vapors. There was the flash of a great, glowing eye like a beautiful star, at the sound of the report.

And it happened as he had hoped. With a great swoop, the giant Bird that knew the distances of space but not the crack of a near revolver shot, rose swiftly, beating frantic wings. Probably the Wise Men of Furos were not sure that the Bird had not risen in a death agony, before it was out of sight beyond the canopy of clouds.

Through a heavy, choking fog, like a long dive in deep water—and the murk thinned. Lights, blurred and dim, clearing to the baleful fires of the stars as Alison had seen them when he left the Earth.

But even in the anguish that was the beginning of death, his heart turned to Irene.

Irene!

He flung his arms out in a gesture of despair—and touched again her hand.

He was fainting—but he could see what he had not seen before—the two great snake skins stretched near him. He could understand, and fold and fasten correctly the one that only half covered the girl he loved, who had dragged them the long distance through the water, and reached the summit with them before the boat was moored and the others made the climb. And even then, with his last strength, but with hope in his heart, he could creep within the other.

His breath came easily, his dim eyes cleared, his heart beat naturally once more. And for a time he could not measure, he watched the small stars grow to burning suns and fall away behind, as the Bird soared on.

And in the night, not now the eternal night of space, but a silvery moon-flooded night, the Bird glided slowly near a planet on which stretched great seas and continents.

"Africa, by George!" Alison murmured softly to himself.

A shimmer of blue and rose; a play of opal shadow; a vast expanse of brightening gold—morning, on Earth. Sand, and far mountains, and, in the distance, a cluster of palm trees and a feather of smoke.

TWO huge, hideous snake skins lay upon the sands. But the Bird had flown as he came—in the night; into the southern skies, where was his home.

Irene's eyes shone with a joy that exactly measured the anguish through which she had passed.

"So the Bird stops in Africa on his return voyage. But who cares?—we are on Earth."

"On Earth. And if Gorlog and his friends try the milk powder I dropped, we've seen our last of Furos, for without them the interstellar ship will never sail. Not for those devils, the first knowledge of the secret of conquering space.

"And, somehow, I feel that the Bird of Space will fly no more to Furos. I believe—he understood what that shot meant—treachery, death——"

"The milk powder——?" Irene interrupted.

"I had mixed it with the cyanide. It is certain death if they eat it."

For awhile they watched the miracle of morning. Then they made their way toward the distant palm trees.

Note—The previous adventures of Alison, Irene and Gorlog were told in "The Bird of Space," in the September issue.

ACROSS SPACE

A Weird-Scientific Serial

By EDMOND HAMILTON

The Story So Far

STRANGE beings living in the extinct volcano of Rano Kao on Easter Island send a great red ray of light stabbing across space and draw the planet Mars from its orbit. As Mars hurtles toward Earth, wild scenes take place in all parts of the world under the threat of fiery destruction when the two planets shall collide. Dr. Whitley and Professor Allan of the University of California fly to Easter Island by hydroplane to investigate the cause of the phenomenon. The human inhabitants of the island have disappeared, and the two investigators are captured by the strange beings from the volcano.

8

I COULD have been unconscious only a few minutes, for when realization returned to me, I was lying on the ground, half supported by Dr. Whitley, who was making anxious efforts to revive me. He sighed with relief when I opened my eyes, and I echoed that sigh, for it seemed that I had just awakened from a torturing nightmare.

I looked past Dr. Whitley, and all my terror rushed back on me, for over my companion's shoulder I saw a thin, white face, glaring down on me with an unhuman stare, its dark eyes motionless and unwinking. As I rose unsteadily to my feet, one glance around me told me where I was, and a bitterness came over me that forced out even my fear, for we two were prisoners at the bottom of the crater!

Near us were standing three of the —*things!* I could not think of them as anything else. The shuddering loathing and horror of my first flashing glimpse of them when we were captured returned now, as I surveyed the three.

They seemed exactly similar to each other, each having the high, shadowy bat wings, wings that were dull white skin stretched on a framework of slender bones, featherless, *reptilian!* The body was human in shape, except for the wings, but was thin and frail-looking, tapering into arms and legs that were nothing but pipe-stems, and that ended in cruel talons instead of fingers and toes. For clothing each of the three wore a simple, sleeveless tunic, or garment, of a gleaming white material, a fabric that had a strangely metallic sheen to it.

I raised my eyes to the faces of the three and a fear that was sickening filled me. For those faces, those heads, were living replicas of the statues on the island. The high, hooked noses, the thin, cruel slit of a mouth, those unearthly ears, if ears they were, all these combined in an expression that was unspeakably hideous in effect. There was intelligence in those faces, I thought, but intelligence only. No humor, nor understanding, nor pity. Nothing but cold, naked intellect.

I noted, too, that the heads of the creatures were high and domed, but entirely hairless, covered by the same dead-white skin as the bodies. Each of the things had its eyes fixed on us, and two of them held small metal cylinders which were aimed directly at us. Obviously these were weapons of some sort, though of what type I did not know. I thought for a moment of the smears of white powder on the ground in the workers' village, and a slight chill passed over me.

I turned away from our captors

and saw now that we were standing very near the great disk which we had glimpsed from above. We stood on a wide circle of metal flooring that seemed to completely surround the disk, and from that near position I could closely inspect this unearthly mechanism that was sucking down a planet.

As I had judged, it was almost a half-mile in diameter, sweeping away from where we stood in a tremendous curve, and raised probably twenty feet above the ground by an interlacing of metal pillars and girders that supported it. Because we stood so near, and beneath it, we could not see the upper surface of the disk, but I saw that it was very thin for its great surface, not being much over twelve inches in thickness. The material of it, I could not determine, but it looked very much like lead, having a dull gleam characteristic of that metal.

At the very edge of the disk, not far from where we stood, a thick metal pillar rose some fifty feet into the air, and supported on its top, like a giant bird-house, was a square metal box, ten feet in dimension each way, that towered above the surface of the disk for a distance of more than twenty-five feet. Set on the top of this box there appeared an object that was seemingly a tiny sun, a small globe which shone with a bluish, intense light, the rays of which illuminated the whole bottom of the crater, though but dimly, and enabled us to see the things I have mentioned.

There were several slots and circular openings in the side of the metal-box structure, and the light that streamed out from these was now and then obscured by some dark body inside the box moving across the openings. Set beside the giant disk, this relatively tiny structure had the appearance of a switchbox of some sort. So I thought as I watched it, and later found that my guess had been right, for it was the controlling center of the disk, and of the disk's powers.

I could see nothing else of interest on the crater's bottom, except for a few low buildings some distance away from us, constructed of the metal which seemed to be the one material of everything in the place. I could dimly make out the wall of the crater in the ghastly, wavering light, and I observed something which made me turn to Dr. Whitley, whom I had momentarily forgotten.

"If I weren't afraid of those tubes, I'd make a break for it," I told him, indicating the weapons which our captors held. "Do you see that big crack in the crater's eastern wall? It wouldn't be hard to climb out there, if we could get away from these things. I don't see any more of the creatures around here, though there were plenty of them when I saw them from above."

"Don't try it!" he warned me. "Those tubes are surely weapons of some kind, and you would be dead before you had gone ten feet."

"But what are they keeping us here for?" I complained. "We seem to be the only ones left in the crater."

It was so, too, for we could see no signs of life other than our three guards on the whole floor of the pit. Where the crowds I had glimpsed, and which we had heard, had gone, I could not conceive, but finally decided that they must have entered the low buildings behind us, though these seemed absurdly small to hold a host such as I had seen.

Dr. Whitley was absorbed in the things around him, and did not reply, so we lapsed into a silence of some minutes, leaving me to my own thoughts. And they were gloomy enough. On all Earth we two were the only ones who knew the nature of the thing that was dragging Earth toward destruction, and we were prisoners of those who were causing that destruction. I wondered if Lieu-

tenant Rider could do anything, then dismissed the thought, for we had asked him not to leave the plane on any account, save to replenish the gasoline supply, if that was possible.

A SLIGHT twittering sound aroused me from my meditations, and I saw that for the first time in our presence our captors were conversing with each other. Their voices were very small and high, considering that the creatures were as large as myself. A language it was that they talked in, we knew that; but it was beyond our efforts to understand. To our ears it was like the chattering of birds, harsh, sometimes shrill, with now and then a low, deep note which reminded us of the chanting we had heard.

We saw, too, that another creature, similar to the three that guarded us, was clambering carefully down the great pillar beside the disk, descending it by means of projecting hooks which we had not noticed. Another of the things emerged from the bottom of the box-structure also, and followed the first one down the pillar. Both, when they reached the ground, came directly toward us and our attentive captors.

Though alike in general appearance, these two seemed different in some ways from our three guards. Their tunics, or garments, were of scarlet material, instead of white, also there was about them a subtly different manner, imperious, commanding, conscious of power.

For a moment they inspected us, then engaged in a short conversation with our guards, who evidently furnished explanations. We waited, breathless, for it was apparent that our fate hung on the commands these two might give.

Then we breathed a little easier, for the two gave a short order to our guards and started back to the disk. I noticed that they walked very poorly, with short, uncertain steps, and wondered why they did not fly directly to and from their edifice at the pillar's top. But our guards now claimed my attention, for one of them began to walk away from us, with the same mincing steps, and the other two, pointing the cylinders at us, motioned for us to follow the first, which we did.

They led us directly to one of the buildings I had noticed, a long, low, windowless structure. I wondered if the rest of the crowd of these things were inside this building, and my interest was so aroused that I was somewhat disappointed when we entered the building's open door, for the interior was almost bare, containing nothing except a number of studs, or switches, that were set in the surface of one of the long, low walls.

As we looked about, one of our guards walked over to that wall, and pressed one of the inset studs. Immediately there was a loud click and a circle of the wall's surface some six feet in diameter slid to one side, revealing behind it a long, hollow cylinder of the same width, that pointed straight back into the wall. And in this cylinder there were seats, seats that reminded me of nothing so much as the queer, swinging chairs in which aviators are tested for sense of direction, chairs that swung on gimbals, as it were, capable of turning in any direction.

One of our guards now advanced and, entering the cylinder, seated himself in one of the swinging chairs, snapping into place across its front a light metal bar, so that he was strapped into the seat by it. He then turned and looked at us, and at the same time the two behind us motioned eloquently toward the cylinder.

Their meaning was plain, only too plain, so we hesitatingly entered the long tube, and installed ourselves in the middle of the cylinder, strapping ourselves into the seats as we had seen our guard do. Our two other captors

followed, and I noticed that when they had installed themselves in two more of the chairs, they swung about to face us, and kept the tubes still trained on us. Certainly they were taking no chances of an escape on our part.

The creature who sat in the foremost seat reached out now to a row of small studs in the cylinder's side, and instantly the section of wall behind us clicked back into place, leaving us in darkness. Another snap, and the cylinder suddenly tilted, so that it hung obliquely, almost in a perpendicular position, as compared to its former horizontal situation. I saw now the purpose of the free-swinging seats, for when the cylinder tilted down, the seats immediately swung up, so that our own position was unchanged, and we felt no discomfort.

The snapping of another stud, a slight jerk, and our bodies pressed against the belts of metal that held us in. The cylinder was falling! There was a humming shriek of wind outside the cylinder, and we had all the sensations of one in a falling elevator, a hundred times multiplied.

I heard Dr. Whitley's voice close to me, above the screaming wind outside. "We are evidently in a pneumatic tube of some sort," he shouted, "and are going at a tremendous rate, I would say."

"But where are we going?" I yelled back to him.

"From our position I would say that we are going almost straight down," he answered, "slanting down at a very steep angle. At a very great velocity, too."

Straight down! Down into Earth's fiery heart? Or was it fiery, after all? Was *that* the place where these things had emerged from? It could not be, it was impossible, and yet——. But if that was their true home, why were they pulling Mars down to their own destruction? Why? Above all, what was to be our fate?

My brain, already half-stupefied by the unimaginable things I had seen, was dizzied with these questions. They swirled through my thoughts, a maelstrom of fact and fancy, as, in a metal cylinder, with three creatures like monsters from a nightmare, we flashed with awful speed down to the unknown interior of the Earth.

9

We could not have been in the cylinder more than five minutes, when the humming wail of our passage dwindled and died, and the vibration ceased. How far we had gone in that short time I could not guess, but it must have been a great distance, considering our tremendous speed. And now the end of the cylinder clicked back and a flood of light entered.

But *not* sunlight! A soft, glowing light that was like liquid gold, holding in its lambent glow whirling little wisps of shining vapor, tiny curlings of radiant mist. While we stared, our guards stepped out of the cylinder, so we released ourselves from our chairs and followed them out.

We emerged into a long room, so very much like the one we had entered a few minutes before that in spite of the strange light I thought that the cylinder must have brought us back to our starting point. We now followed our captors out of the building, then stood rooted to the ground with sheer astonishment at the scene that lay before us.

We were standing on a high point of ground; behind us was the building we had just left, and all around us lay the inconceivably ancient city of these bat-folk, stretching away into the distance as far as eye could see, a mighty mass of roofless buildings, pierced here and there by long streets.

And every edifice was built of the same metal that had already become so familiar to us.

Pouring down on the city was a flood of golden light, filtering softly down through the clouds of shining mist that hid its source. There could be seen no sky or roof above us, nothing but those clouds of radiant mist that seemed to be thicker and thicker the farther the eye pierced them, veiling absolutely what might lie above them.

One building in the city stood out above all the others, a mighty pile that lay not a thousand feet from us, and unlike all the other structures we saw, it was roofed. Inside of its vast dome might have been placed St. Peter's itself, without touching, so huge it was. It was immeasurably larger than any other of the city's structures, which stretched away on all sides until hid from vision by the mists that seemed to permeate this whole place.

Flitting here and there above the buildings were a number of the bat-folk, like those who guarded us, but they seemed very few in number compared to the mighty metropolis in which they dwelt. About the whole vast city hovered an air of desolation and death, a subtle suggestion of grandeur that had past.

While we were thus surveying the place, our guards stood motionless behind us, making no effort to force us to go forward, though I noticed that still they kept their deadly tubes trained upon us. I seized the chance to talk to Dr. Whitley, who was eagerly taking in the sights about us.

"Where do you think we are?" I asked him.

"Underground, without doubt," he replied. "Where else could we be?"

"We can't be," I said. "Where does that light come from? And all this?" I made a sweeping gesture to the scene around us.

"As to the light——" he began, then broke off speaking and stared away from me, down a street which ended directly at this point.

I looked, to see what had turned his thoughts, then I too gazed in a fixed stare of horror, for two things were coming toward us that were so utterly unlike anything we had ever seen or dreamed of or thought of, that we were almost sick with that first shock of surprize and terror.

The winged things which had captured us, God knows they were unhuman in appearance, but at least they had human faces and features, or near human. The two creatures that were running toward us, though, were so absolutely unhuman in appearance as to resemble only the unknown beasts of some far-flung star.

Their bodies were, roughly, human in shape, having two short lower limbs on which they ran, and two powerful-looking arms, or upper limbs, of extraordinary length. But directly above the shoulders, the body ceased! There was no neck, no head, no sign of features of any kind. The bodies themselves seemed of a pinkish flesh, with a slimy look to it, as though the skin had been left off.

As they ran toward us, their footless limbs padded softly on the metallic floor of the street. I noticed that they wore no more clothing than any animal, and that directly between their shoulders, where the neck should have sprung, there was an oval spot of bluish black that stood out plainly against the repellent pink color of their bodies.

The two monsters came very close, and we shrank back, then they halted and seemed to be regarding our three guards. And the three, in their turn, looked steadily at the two creatures. No sound was uttered, no word or gesture passed between them, but as though they had received a clear command, the two monsters began to conduct us down the street, one leading and the other following us, while one

of our three late guards made a gesture to us that seemed to indicate that we were to follow wherever they led.

We followed them. What else could we do? I wondered, though, if it would not be possible to break away from the two, as they had neither weapons nor power of sight, that we could see. So to put this idea to the test, I wandered slightly from behind the leading creature, and made as if to turn down a different street.

For a moment the thing in front continued without me, then it stopped short, and turning, rushed toward me with appalling speed, going directly for me. I stepped aside but it swerved also, and instantly it had grasped me around the neck with one of its arms, or upper limbs, and was pulling me with tremendous force back to the proper direction.

And the arm with which it grasped me was boneless, for it curled around my neck twice, like a boa-constrictor, and with all of that reptile's crushing power. I shrank frantically from the slimy, cold contact of that faceless monstrosity; and after that I made no more tests, but carefully followed the thing before me.

As we were conducted across the city, through its long, angled streets, we said nothing to each other, absorbed each in the things that led us, and the scene around us. And we saw that the city was truly a dead city, for in its streets was no throng, no pushing crowd, and the buildings that lined these streets were empty and deserted. A few of the bat-folk flapped by overhead, and one or two who caught sight of us being led along spiraled down and circled above us, inspecting us, but all flew away after a minute, nor did our monstrous guards notice them at all, so far as we saw.

Here and there in the streets we saw other creatures like those who were conducting us, and I noticed that all of these seemed quite busy, running to and fro with great speed, some carrying packages of indeterminate contents, others with what looked like strange tools. It was clear enough that they were slaves, or servants, of the winged bat-things.

Our guards came now to a small building, which was roofed, in contrast with those around it, and we entered this and proceeded with them down a corridor to a door, fastened on the outside by a metal bar that rested across it, in hooks set in the wall. The creature in front of us removed this bar and opened the door, standing beside it, and—I almost said gazing at us, so evident it was that his attention was focused on us.

His meaning was plain enough, so we reluctantly passed through the door into a small cell, and the door clanged shut behind us. The bar outside fell into place and we heard the soft pattering of our guards' limbs, as they went back down the corridor.

A slight rustling sound turned our attention quickly to the interior of the cell itself, and by the light from a small window set high up in the wall, we saw a shapeless bundle that lay in one corner of the room, covered by a piece of white cloth. We shrank back. With what new terror had we been imprisoned?

The bundle moved again, and we watched, fascinated. Then the cloth covering was suddenly thrown aside and the thing sat up and faced us. It was a human being like ourselves! It was a man!

10

As I gazed, astounded, there was a sudden movement on the part of my companion, and then he had thrown himself on the floor beside the man there and was crying to him, "Holland! You here? It is I, Whitley!" And now Dr. Whitley looked

up to me, and his voice was passionate with anger.

"What have they done to him?" he cried. "Look here!" And he pointed to the man's body.

I knelt down to see, then sickened with pain at the sight, for both of the man's legs were gone at the knee, replaced by shapeless stumps, and the left arm was also missing at the shoulder, a white pad of flesh marking its former juncture.

The man opened his eyes, now, and looked at us with an expression of fear on his face, a cowering back, that was pitiful to see. He had been a fine physical figure once, a six-footer with a viking's strength and appearance, and strong, bearded face, but it was terrible to see the wreck he had become.

His eyes wandered over our faces, then his stare fixed itself on my companion's features, and he grasped Whitley by the shoulder with his one hand. Then, "Oh, God!" he said, hoarsely, and again, "My God!"

"You know me, Holland?" asked Dr. Whitley. "You remember me, don't you? And Berkeley, and the university?"

"Berkeley," repeated the man on the floor, pondering. "Yes. And you, Whitley, you here! How in God's name did you get here?"

In as few words as possible, Dr. Whitley explained the way in which we had been brought there, speaking of the falling of Mars which had been the cause of our journey to the island. I looked for some surprize on Holland's part at this news, but he seemed to take no interest in it. And his next words showed us that he already knew that much.

"Yes, as to Mars, I know about that," he told us. "For years and years, it seems, I've been here, and I've learned some things. Years and years!" And as he repeated the words, he seemed to be musing over them.

"Then you have been here ever since the first time of your disappearance?" asked Whitley.

"My disappearance?" he questioned. "Yes, I suppose that was a mystery to you outside. It was simple enough. I had gone out that night to nose around the ruins that are found here and there in the island's interior. One moment I was examining a pile of crumbling blocks, the next moment something grabbed me from behind and I was carried through the air down to Rano Kao's crater. They whizzed me down that big mail-tube of theirs to this private hell. I suppose you came down the same way?" And as we nodded, he continued, "Well, it was the same then, but they had it masked, of course, at the spot where it emerged on the crater's bottom. And all that clutter of apparatus on the crater's floor was not there then, of course. But do you know yet where you are? What is your idea, Whitley?"

Dr. Whitley considered for a moment, then spoke thoughtfully. "I take it that we are in some immense cavern under the Pacific. We practically know that the moon was thrown out of what is now the Pacific when Earth was still molten, and I would say that this is one of the caverns that might have been formed by that cataclysm. Is that correct?" And he looked toward Holland.

Holland nodded his head. "Partly so. I'll tell you what I know of the whole thing, though. I've learned a good deal down here. I know their language, and damned hard it was to learn, for a human throat can make only about half of the sounds they use to converse with. I can understand what they say, though, and so I've picked up information here and there. I talked, too, with the Science Council, three times." His face darkened at some bitter memory of his own.

"But why were you captured and kept here at all?" I interjected. "And why do you suppose they got us too, instead of killing us as they did the others on the island?"

He considered me grimly, then pointed to his maimed body, legless and distorted. "That's why I was captured," he said. Then, seeing that we did not understand, he went on. "Just how much do you know about these things, anyway?"

"Very little," Whitley put in. "We didn't even suspect their existence until they seized us from behind."

"Well, I can give you some light on them," said Holland. "First, though, where do you think they came from, anyway?"

I answered quickly. "Why, they must have always lived down here," I told him. "Maybe, though, they came up here from even greater depths in the Earth."

He smiled slightly. "Yet if they always lived here, who carved those statues on the island above, exact copies of these things?" I was reduced to silence by this question, and he turned to Whitley, saying, "And you, Whitley?"

Again Dr. Whitley considered before replying. "I think it very probable that they came originally from the Earth above," he said. "We know that there was once a continent in the Pacific, which sank beneath the ocean centuries ago, and the highest peaks of which are now the islands of that ocean. I would say that these things are children of the upper Earth, even as we are, but developments of some different chain of evolution. We know that at one spot there is a great forking in the long road of evolution, that from slime to fish to reptile it is roughly single, then turns to two different paths, one the path of mammals, from which we have come, and the other the path of birds, from which these things have risen. I take it that this development occurred centuries ago and that these things reached a high state of civilization on the lost continent in the Pacific, and were forced down to these caverns when the land sank beneath them. Yet two things I can not understand: the reason why they should pull Mars down to their destruction, and the cause of existence of those monsters who serve them. Those latter are creatures completely removed from any thinkable evolutionary process."

Holland nodded approvingly as Dr. Whitley finished. "Near, very near," he said. "Yet still you are far from the basic truth. Well, this much I can tell you. These things, these bat-people, never originated on our Earth at all, or inside it." He looked at our faces, eloquent of our amazement, then said quietly, "They came here from Mars!"

11

From Mars! So there was a connection, after all, with the falling of that planet! The swift questions gathered on our lips, but he silenced us with a gesture and went on, staring darkly at the wall while he unfolded a cosmic chronicle.

"Some things I have learned from one, some from another, that enable me to piece together their past. And it is much like this:

"Ages ago, eons ago, when most of Earth was steaming jungle, there was a great civilization on the older world of Mars. But it was a waning civilization, for the races on Mars, all of whom are like these bat-folk, were crowded together intolerably, and conditions were very hard. The planet was no longer adequate for their support, in spite of their great science and knowledge.

"And since the government of the planet was intensely autocratic, a

few, a very few, continued to live in comfort and luxury, while life became harder and harder for the masses they ruled. So it was that from time to time there were sporadic rebellions and outbreaks against the rulers, yet did the reigning oligarchy always put down such revolts, for they controlled all of the weapons on the planet, and virtually all of the scientists were of their number. And so the ages passed, and it seemed that the great masses of Martians must endure their wretched lot of slavery forever, a lot that was growing harder and harder to bear.

"But at the hour when their plight seemed worst, a spark of hope flared out for them, for one of their number who was a dabbler in science and was one of the bitterest rebels, discovered a way to screen gravity, to cut off its effect entirely on any object thus screened. Such a discovery made it possible to navigate the space between the worlds; so, constructing a work-shop in the icy, deserted north of the planet, the little council of rebellious Martians worked to build a vehicle that would be able to venture out into space. And when they tested the space-ship they had built, they found that it was a complete success.

"So the council of the rebels adopted a daring plan. Since it was evident, they said, that there was no hope of a successful revolt against their rulers, their only chance of a better lot was to migrate to another planet, a warmer, richer planet, where life would be easier. The Mayflower drama enacted on a cosmic scale.

"And for the planet to come to, they picked Earth, as being most fitted for them to dwell in. So they built vast numbers of the space-ships in secret, and on a given night left Mars by the thousands, flocking sunward to the Earth, and leaving no trace or plan behind them of the space-ships, so that they could not be pursued and attacked later.

"It was a daring plan and it was crowned with success. After a survey of the Earth's surface, they settled down in a vast, rich land, a continent that stood where is now the South Pacific. And they grew great there, their empire waxed mighty, and while the forerunners of men were hairy half-apes, chasing small game across the plains of Asia, they were building temples and palaces and vast cities.

"Their science grew too, and in time they penetrated into a vast cavern far beneath them, formed by the throwing off of the molten moon, as you have suggested. This subterranean world was eternally glowing with a soft light, a light that had its source in the hidden roof of the cavern, in a certain radio-active element that abounded there, twin to the radio-active element that causes Mount Tycho to blaze out so brilliantly on the moon.

"This cavern was a pleasant place, and in time they built a city there, and lived there during the rainy season. So each year when the torrential rains commenced on the world above, they retired to their warm, dry world beneath and spent the time pleasantly enough there.

"So the centuries wheeled away, and for every king they had, they carved a statue of him and placed it on a high peak of their land, a peak that is now Easter Island. As the ages fled by, hundreds of such statues dotted the peak.

"And their science made triumph after triumph. For long they had desired slaves to serve them, but the humans they captured for this purpose could not be used. Their fierce, savage natures could not be tamed, and they died soon, proving entirely useless as slaves.

"So their scientists took counsel, and produced at last the creatures

that are now their slaves, two of which brought you here. The Martian scientists had gone far within the secrets of life and death, so far that they were now able to reproduce the processes of life itself, and make out of inorganic elements the things you have seen.

"It may sound mad to you but it is the literal truth. I have seen the things being made myself, and a ghastly sight it is. They do not eat, they do not sleep, they are literally living machines, needing only a certain stimulant from time to time, which is injected into them just as you oil a machine. And they are perfect servants, for they have only one sense beside touch, a sense of telepathy, by means of which they can perceive all that we can with our five. Their extremely limited brains receive the commands of their Martian masters in thought waves and automatically translate those commands into action. I have thought, sometimes—but I will speak of that later.

"So the Martians flourished on Earth, and it seemed that they could never be menaced by any power, yet a power finally came that threatened their destruction. The continent on which was their empire began slowly to sink into the ocean, and their outlying towns were ingulfed, one after another. They took counsel among themselves, and decided it was imperative that they go elsewhere, but where?

"Back to Mars they could not go, nor to another planet, for with all their advance in science, they had lost the secret of the space-ships, the gravity screen. Ages ago it had been forgotten, deliberately forgotten, in fact, for they had had no further need of the space-ships and they feared lest some traitor might return to Mars in one of them and, disclosing their existence on the Earth, bring down on them an avalanche of destruction and revenge from their former rulers.

"So to another planet they could not go. And the rest of the Earth was unattractive to them, after their own warm, rich country, being either bleak plain, dense jungle, or glacier-covered realms of ice.

"The course they took might have been foreseen. Gathering together all their wealth and slaves, they descended into their cavern home far below Earth's surface, and took up their existence there, secure from danger. The continent they had left sank and sank, until only a few of its highest peaks remained above the ocean's surface, but they cared little for that, secure in their empire beneath.

"So the ages wheeled still farther away, and above them man began his reign, vaulting up to a civilization and power of his own, yet far, far below, the Martians continued in their city, unknown by those above, and caring nothing for the hordes of men who never suspected their presence. And still the years fled by.

11

"But in the underworld their numbers did not grow. It is true that they lived for great periods of time, but fewer and fewer became their young, and they dwindled, dwindled. Pursuing their own pleasure, they neglected this fact until they finally woke to realization that only a few thousands were left of their once mighty empire. Nothing that is born to live in the open air can flourish beneath the ground, and this they now realized.

"So, piercing a way up to the upper Earth from their cavern home, they rose for the first time in ages to the world above. Their path had its opening above on that same peak where they had placed the statues of their kings, a peak that was an island

now, inhabited by a handful of men. Secretly, and by night, they sent out their spies from the island, winging their way over the Earth, surveying its condition. They saw that much of it was now fit to dwell in, but they saw also that it was covered by the countless masses of men that held it, and they knew that with all their science, the few thousands of them left could never wrest the Earth from the races of men, unaided.

"But go up they must, or pass into extinction. So for the first time in ages, their thoughts turned back to Mars, their mother planet. Long ago their original resentment at their former rulers had faded, since for generations that had been only a tradition. So when the council met, they decided to communicate with Mars, if possible, and ascertain conditions there, with the hope of procuring there the aid they needed to conquer the Earth.

"How they communicated with those on Mars, I do not know, but doubtless it was with some form of radio. At any rate, they discovered that their mother planet was in terrible straits, crowded with those of their own race, starving on a dying, cooling planet. So it was but natural that those on Mars, after their first astonishment, should eagerly agree to help them grasp the Earth for themselves, wiping out the races of men who occupied it.

"And now they encountered their great problem. How were they to bring the hordes of Martians from Mars to Earth? Once here they could easily conquer Earth with their superior science and weapons, yet how to bring them here seemed an insoluble problem. The secret of the space-ships was lost, and even had they had it, it would have taken untold years to build enough of the space-ships with which to bring the necessary number of Martians to the Earth.

"This was the problem that the council faced, and for years they worked on it, in collaboration with those on Mars. And finally they perfected a stupendous plan, which was nothing less than to bring the planet Mars itself across space to the Earth. It would be brought near enough to the Earth so that the atmospheres of the two planets would just touch, and then the Martian hordes could fly directly from their own planet to Earth, in an extremely short time. And Mars was to be made to circle the Earth, like another moon.

"For power to do this thing, to reach out and pull a world toward the Earth, the council relied on a fact that is known to every schoolboy on Earth. It was stunning in its very simplicity.

"As is well known, the Earth, like every other planet, is a vast magnet, with a north magnetic pole, and a south magnetic pole, even as every planet has a north and south magnetic pole. Now the north pole of any magnet will repel the north pole of another magnet, but will attract the south pole of another magnet. It is the simplest rule in physics, the basic law of magnetism, that like poles repel and unlike poles attract.

"The vast magnetism of the Earth is inconceivable in its power, but it is radiated into space at its poles without affecting its position. And the plan of the council was this, that they focus, concentrate, the magnetic power of Earth's northern pole and hurl it out into space in a concentrated ray, aiming it so that it would exactly strike the south magnetic pole of Mars. You see the plan? An enormous attraction would be the result, enough to pull the smaller planet of Mars out of its orbit and start it falling toward the Earth. To guard against the Earth's also being jerked from its orbit, and being pulled out to meet Mars, they

planned to send out the attractive ray only at a time when the position of the other planets would be such as to hold Earth in its proper course by their gravitational power.

"But it was not enough to have the attractive ray. They must have a repellent ray also, so that they could halt Mars when it neared the Earth, and prevent a collision that would mean destruction. And for a repellent ray they planned to concentrate in a like manner the magnetism of Earth's southern pole, which, directed against Mars' southern pole, would repel the red planet, in accordance with the law of magnetism.

"So they began work, and in ten years their great task was finished. Their underground connections stretched from the north and south magnetic poles of the Earth to their masked, secret laboratory in the crater of Rano Kao. Of their apparatus at the two poles I know no more than you, but its function was to gather together and focus the magnetism of each of Earth's poles, and, when the proper connection was made, to transmit it to their apparatus inside Rano Kao.

"All was ready, yet before emerging onto the upper Earth, they desired to have a sure, deadly weapon against the races of man, who might molest them in their work. So they perfected a deadly ray, a ray that crumbles a human body into a puff of white powder instantly. They needed only a human being on whom to test it, and I was destined to be that, for it was for that purpose they caught me.

"They experimented on me as on a guinea pig, turning different rays on arms and legs to observe their action. They would not kill me outright for I was too valuable a specimen. And God, how I prayed for death!

"The ray was a success, so at a chosen time fifty of them armed themselves with it and emerged onto the island, wiping out every living thing on the island with it. Then came the others from beneath, setting into place the great disk that aims the ray, and placing beside it the switch-box that controls its action. A great bell was brought up, too, and placed beside the disk.

"And on the first night, only a few days ago, they met in the great temple down here and conducted a ceremony of some kind, going through their rites for an hour before they ascended to the disk. They have been doing that ever since, too, and every one of them must take part in their ceremonies at the temple, before rising to the crater, every one, that is, except the two who guard the switch-box of the disk, above. I never saw what they did in the temple, but I could hear them chanting, chanting.

"And so, perhaps twenty minutes after midnight, they streamed up to the crater through the tubes, and ranged themselves around the disk. I was taken up also, by two of the slave-creatures, just why I do not know. Was it some queer sense of triumph on their part? Were they simply wishing to show me the power that was theirs? They went through another ceremony up there, chanting another weird hymn, which I could not understand, since it seemed to be in a very ancient, twisted version of their own language. And when the bell sounded for the third time, the ray was snapped on, for the third bell-note sounds always when Mars is passing across the path in which the ray is aimed, and thus they knew the exact moment to stab out the ray, hurling the concentrated magnetism of Earth's north magnetic pole out across space to the south magnetic pole of Mars.

"So far they have used only a tenth of the attractive power at their command, for they feared to jerk Mars out of its orbit too swiftly, lest

the other planets be sucked out of their own positions, and the universe be wrecked. Yet that tenth was enough to stop the planet in its course and pull it toward Earth. The two moons of Mars had already been shaken off by those on Mars, using the same plan, for they were afraid that when Mars arrived and began to circle Earth, the two little moons would crash either into Earth or into our own moon, and cause disaster.

"Of the rest, you know as much as I. The planet is falling toward us with immense speed, a speed that is growing greater each night they use the attractive ray. A few days now, and it will be here, and then I seem to see the skies darkened by the Martian hordes pouring down on the Earth. And they have that crumbling ray.

"On all Earth we three alone realize the true nature of the awful peril that confronts our world. And here we lie, tightly locked into a metal cell, miles underground, and guarded by soulless, mindless monsters!"

13

WE STARED at each other in dumb terror. For we knew now the peril that confronted our Earth, a peril beside which the collision we had feared would be a mercifully quick death. And I had a vision in my mind of what might be, of what would be, when the planet hurtling toward us would fill the sky, and its numberless hordes of winged inhabitants would be swooping down on Earth in a great cloud of death and destruction.

I had a vision of that ray flashing out and reducing great crowds to drifting white dust, of those brainless brutes that were servants to the Martians running wild through a fear-stricken world, slaying, slaying at the command of their masters. And I shuddered at the pictures that rose in my mind.

The voice of Dr. Whitley broke into my thoughts. "If it were possible to get inside that switch-box, one could turn on the repellent ray, then?" he asked Holland.

"Possible," Holland assented, "but impossible to get into the place. It is guarded at all times by two of the Science Council, and they have that crumbling ray also, as a protection. Yet it is the only chance of saving our Earth! If we could send out the green ray, even now it would push Mars back into space, farther back than its original orbit, I think, for as I said, both attractive and repellent rays are extremely powerful, so powerful that they have used only a small part of the red ray's possible power."

"You speak of the red and green ray," Whitley observed; "I take it that the repellent ray is green, then?"

"Yes, that is so," Holland said. "Why, I don't know, but it is a fact that the ray that is the concentrated magnetism of Earth's northern pole is red, and the southern pole's ray is green. Perhaps they caused this themselves, to differentiate between the two. There is so much I don't know about it all!

"I have a plan," he went on, "by means of which you two may be able to escape and get to the tube entrance. If you do, you can get up to the crater without much trouble, for I will try to explain to you how the mechanism of the tube is operated. And once in the crater, there is a million to one chance that you may be able to get into the switch-box, in spite of the two who guard it, and send out the green ray. Perhaps you might not be able to operate it, though. And God help you if you turned on both rays at once! Imagine the whole magnetic power of the Earth released in a crater like that!

But we will see, we will see——" He relapsed into a brooding silence.

"Why did they bring us down here, though?" I asked. "I can't understand that, when they killed all the others on the island."

"Who can say what their intentions are?" he countered. "I suppose, though, that you are destined for more experiments," and he pointed to his own maimed body. "You will be taken to the next meeting of the Science Council, and then, God help you!"

I was struck with his repetition of the name, and asked, "The Science Council? Just what is it, anyway?"

The expression on his face at my question seemed to indicate that he was remembering all the things he had suffered. "It is the ruling body of the Martians, composed of the greatest scientists of their race. They long ago discarded the idea of a king or other single head of government, and are ruled entirely by their wisest members. And surely they must have tremendous knowledge, to evolve a scheme like this bringing of Mars to the Earth. And, too, they are devils. I know that."

After that a silence fell upon us, nor were there any sounds from outside. Now and then we heard a pattering outside, as one of the servant creatures went by, but that was all. The whole city was dead, I thought, its once teeming throngs had gone down to a darker darkness in which there was no light, and silence ruled almost undisputed in this subterranean Babylon.

So thinking, I gradually drifted off to sleep, for there was nothing else to do, and I was very tired. I had unconsciously been waiting for night to come, forgetful that there was no time here, where it was always daylight and always noon, with no moon or stars or tide to measure the hours, nothing but the softly glowing light that never shaded into dusk or sprang out in flaming dawn.

Across the little room I saw Whitley and Holland earnestly conversing, but in the lassitude that gripped me, I did not even desire to know the subject of their conversation. Death was coming, I thought, and that was my last conscious idea before dropping off into a dreamless sleep that was surely death's brother.

This story will be brought to a breath-taking conclusion next month in the thrilling chapters that describe the weird happenings in the crater of Rano Kao as Mars hurtles toward Earth

WEIRD STORY REPRINT

No. 16. The Bagman's Story

By CHARLES DICKENS

ONE winter's evening, about 5 o'clock, just as it began to grow dusk, a man in a gig might have been seen urging his tired horse along the road which leads across Marlborough Downs, in the direction of Bristol. I say he might have been seen, and I have no doubt he would have been, if anybody but a blind man happened to pass that way; but the weather was so bad, and the night so cold and wet, that nothing was out but the water, and so the traveler jogged along in the middle of the road, lonesome and dreary enough. If any bagman of that day could have caught sight of the little neck-or-nothing sort of gig, with a clay-colored body and red wheels, and the vixenish, ill-tempered, fast-going bay mare, that looked like a cross between a butcher's horse and a two-penny post-office pony, he would have known at once that this traveler could have been no other than Tom Smart, of the great house of Bilson and Slum, Cateaton Street, City. However, as there was no bagman to look on, nobody knew anything at all about the matter; and so Tom Smart and his clay-colored gig with the red wheels, and the vixenish mare with the fast pace, went on together, keeping the secret among them: and nobody was a bit the wiser.

There are many pleasanter places even in this dreary world than Marlborough Downs when it blows hard; and if you throw in besides, a gloomy winter's evening, a miry and sloppy road, and a pelting fall of heavy rain, and try the effect, by way of experiment, in your own proper person, you will experience the full force of this observation.

The wind blew—not up the road or down it, though that's bad enough, but sheer across it, sending the rain slanting down like the lines they used to rule in the copybooks at school, to make the boys slope well. For a moment it would die away, and the traveler would begin to delude himself into the belief that, exhausted with its previous fury, it had quietly laid itself down to rest, when, whoo! he would hear it growling and whistling in the distance, and on it would come rushing over the hilltops, and sweeping along the plain, gathering sound and strength as it drew nearer, until it dashed with a heavy gust against horse and man, driving the sharp rain into their ears, and its cold damp breath into their very bones; and past them it would scour, far, far away, with a stunning roar, as if in ridicule of their weakness, and triumphant in the consciousness of its own strength and power.

The bay mare splashed away, through the mud and water, with drooping ears; now and then tossing her head as if to express her disgust at this very ungentlemanly behavior of the elements, but keeping a good pace notwithstanding, until a gust of wind, more furious than any that had yet assailed them, caused her to stop suddenly and plant her four feet firmly against the ground, to prevent

her being blown over. It's a special mercy that she did this, for if she *had* been blown over, the vixenish mare was so light, and the gig was so light, and Tom Smart such a lightweight into the bargain, that they must infallibly have all gone rolling over and over together, until they reached the confines of earth, or until the wind fell; and in either case the probability is, that neither the vixenish mare, nor the clay-colored gig with the red wheels, nor Tom Smart, would ever have been fit for service again.

"Well, damn my straps and whiskers," says Tom Smart (Tom sometimes had an unpleasant knack of swearing); "damn my straps and whiskers," says Tom, "if this ain't pleasant, blow me!"

You'll very likely ask me why, as Tom Smart had been pretty well blown already, he expressed this wish to be submitted to the same process again. I can't say—all I know is, that Tom Smart said so—or at least he always told my uncle he said so, and it's just the same thing.

"Blow me," says Tom Smart; and the mare neighed as if she were precisely of the same opinion.

"Cheer up, old girl," said Tom, patting the bay mare on the neck with the end of his whip. "It won't do pushing on, such a night as this; the first house we come to we'll put up at, so the faster you go the sooner it's over. So-ho, old girl—gently—gently."

Whether the vixenish mare was sufficiently well acquainted with the tones of Tom's voice to comprehend his meaning, or whether she found it colder standing still than moving on, of course I can't say. But I can say that Tom had no sooner finished speaking, than she pricked up her ears, and started forward at a speed which made the clay-colored gig rattle till you would have supposed every one of the red spokes was going to fly out on the turf of Marlborough Downs; and even Tom, whip as he was, couldn't stop or check her pace, until she drew up, of her own accord, before a roadside inn on the right-hand side of the way, about half a quarter of a mile from the end of the Downs.

Tom cast a hasty glance at the upper part of the house as he threw the reins to the hostler, and stuck the whip in the box. It was a strange old place, built of a kind of shingle, inlaid, as it were, with crossbeams, with gabled-topped windows projecting completely over the pathway, and a low door with a dark porch, and a couple of steep steps leading down into the house, instead of the modern fashion of half a dozen shallow ones leading up to it. It was a comfortable-looking place though, for there was a strong cheerful light in the bar-window, which shed a bright ray across the road, and even lighted up the hedge on the other side; and there was a red flickering light in the opposite window, one moment but faintly discernible, and the next gleaming strongly through the drawn curtains, which intimated that a rousing fire was blazing within. Marking these little evidences with the eye of an experienced traveler, Tom dismounted with as much agility as his half-frozen limbs would permit, and entered the house.

In less than five minutes' time, Tom was ensconced in the room opposite the bar—the very room where he had imagined the fire blazing—before a substantial matter-of-fact roaring fire, composed of something short of a bushel of coals, and wood enough to make half a dozen decent gooseberry bushes, piled half-way up the chimney, and roaring and crackling with a sound that of itself would have warmed the heart of any reasonable man. This was comfortable, but this was not all, for a smartly dressed girl,

with a bright eye and a neat ankle, was laying a very clean white cloth on the table; and as Tom sat with his slippered feet on the fender, and his back to the open door, he saw a charming prospect of the bar reflected in the glass over the chimney-piece, with delightful rows of green bottles and gold labels, together with jars of pickles and preserves, and cheeses and boiled hams, and rounds of beef, arranged on shelves in the most tempting and delicious array. Well, this was comfortable too; but even this was not all—for in the bar, seated at tea at the nicest possible little table, drawn close up before the brightest possible little fire, was a buxom widow of somewhere about eight-and-forty or thereabouts, with a face as comfortable as the bar, who was evidently the landlady of the house, and the supreme ruler over all these agreeable possessions. There was only one drawback to the beauty of the whole picture, and that was a tall man—a very tall man—in a brown coat and bright basket buttons, and black whiskers, and wavy black hair, who was seated at tea with the widow, and who it required no great penetration to discover was in a fair way of persuading her to be a widow no longer, but to confer upon him the privilege of sitting down in that bar, for and during the whole remainder of the term of his natural life.

Tom Smart was by no means of an irritable or envious disposition, but somehow or other the tall man with the brown coat and the bright basket buttons did rouse what little gall he had in his composition, and did make him feel extremely indignant: the more especially as he could now and then observe, from his seat before the glass, certain little affectionate familiarities passing between the tall man and the widow, which sufficiently denoted that the tall man was as high in favor as he was in size. Tom was fond of hot punch—I may venture to say he was *very* fond of hot punch—and after he had seen the vixenish mare well fed and well littered down, and had eaten every bit of the nice little hot dinner which the widow tossed up for him with her own hands, he just ordered a tumbler of it, by way of experiment. Now, if there was one thing in the whole range of domestic art, which the widow could manufacture better than another, it was this identical article; and the first tumbler was adapted to Tom Smart's taste with such peculiar nicety, that he ordered a second with the least possible delay. Hot punch is a pleasant thing, gentlemen—an extremely pleasant thing under any circumstances—but in that snug old parlor, before the roaring fire, with the wind blowing outside till every timber in the old house creaked again, Tom Smart found it perfectly delightful. He ordered another tumbler, and then another—I am not quite certain whether he didn't order another after that—but the more he drank of the hot punch, the more he thought of the tall man.

"Confound his impudence!" said Tom to himself; "what business has he in that snug bar? Such an ugly villain, too!" said Tom. "If the widow had any taste, she might surely pick up some better fellow than that." Here Tom's eye wandered from the glass on the chimney-piece, to the glass on the table; and as he felt himself becoming gradually sentimental, he emptied the fourth tumbler of punch and ordered a fifth.

Tom Smart, gentlemen, had always been very much attached to the public line. It had long been his ambition to stand in a bar of his own, in a green coat, knee-cords, and tops. He had a great notion of taking the chair at convivial dinners, and he had often thought how well he could preside in a room of his own in the talking way, and what a capital example he could set to his customers

in the drinking department. All these things passed rapidly through Tom's mind as he sat drinking the hot punch by the roaring fire, and he felt very justly and properly indignant that the tall man should be in a fair way of keeping such an excellent house, while he, Tom Smart, was as far off from it as ever. So, after deliberating over the two last tumblers, whether he hadn't a perfect right to pick a quarrel with the tall man for having contrived to get into the good graces of the buxom widow, Tom Smart at last arrived at the satisfactory conclusion that he was a very ill-used and persecuted individual, and had better go to bed.

Up a wide and ancient staircase the smart girl preceded Tom, shading the chamber candle with her hand, to protect it from the currents of air which in such a rambling old place might have found plenty of room to disport themselves, without blowing the candle out, but which did blow it out nevertheless; thus affording Tom's enemies an opportunity of asserting that it was he, and not the wind, who extinguished the candle, and that while he pretended to be blowing it alight again, he was in fact kissing the girl. Be this as it may, another light was obtained, and Tom was conducted through a maze of rooms, and a labyrinth of passages, to the apartment which had been prepared for his reception, where the girl bade him good-night, and left him alone.

It was a good large room with big closets, and a bed which might have served for a whole boarding-school, to say nothing of a couple of oaken presses that would have held the baggage of a small army; but what struck Tom's fancy most was a strange, grim-looking high-backed chair, carved in the most fantastic manner, with a flowered damask cushion, and the round knobs at the bottom of the legs carefully tied up in red cloth, as if it had got the gout in its toes. Of any other queer chair, Tom would only have thought it *was* a queer chair, and there would have been an end of the matter; but there was something about this particular chair, and yet he couldn't tell what it was, so odd and so unlike any other piece of furniture he had ever seen, that it seemed to fascinate him. He sat down before the fire, and stared at the old chair for half an hour—deuce take the chair, it was such a strange old thing, he couldn't take his eyes off it.

"Well," said Tom, slowly undressing himself, and staring at the old chair all the while, which stood with a mysterious aspect by the bedside, "I never saw such a rum concern as that in my days. Very odd," said Tom, who had got rather sage with the hot punch. "Very odd." Tom shook his head with an air of profound wisdom, and looked at the chair again. He couldn't make anything of it though, so he got into bed, covered himself up warm, and fell asleep.

In about half an hour, Tom woke up, with a start, from a confused dream of tall men and tumblers of punch; and the first object that presented itself to his waking imagination was the queer chair.

"I won't look at it any more," said Tom to himself, and he squeezed his eyelids together, and tried to persuade himself he was going to sleep again. No use; nothing but queer chairs danced before his eyes, kicking up their legs, jumping over each other's backs, and playing all kinds of antics.

"I may as well see one real chair, as two or three complete sets of false ones," said Tom, bringing out his head from under the bedclothes. There it was, plainly discernible by the light of the fire, looking as provoking as ever.

Tom gazed at the chair; and suddenly, as he looked at it, a most extraordinary change seemed to come over it. The carving of the back gradually assumed the lineaments and expression of an old shriveled human face; the damask cushion became an antique, flapped waistcoat; the round knobs grew into a couple of feet, encased in red cloth slippers; and the old chair looked like a very ugly old man, of the previous century, with his arms akimbo. Tom sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes to dispel the illusion. No. The chair was an ugly old gentleman; and what was more, he was winking at Tom Smart.

Tom was naturally a headlong, careless sort of dog, and he had had five tumblers of hot punch into the bargain; so, although he was a little startled at first, he began to grow rather indignant when he saw the old gentleman winking and leering at him with such an impudent air. At length he resolved that he wouldn't stand it; and as the old face still kept winking away as fast as ever, Tom said, in a very angry tone:

"What the devil are you winking at me for?"

"Because I like it, Tom Smart," said the chair; or the old gentleman, whichever you like to call him. He stopped winking though, when Tom spoke, and began grinning like a superannuated monkey.

"How do you know my name, old nutcracker-face!" inquired Tom Smart, rather staggered; though he pretended to carry it off so well.

"Come, come, Tom," said the old gentleman, "that's not the way to address solid Spanish mahogany. Dam'me, you couldn't treat me with less respect if I was veneered." When the old gentleman said this, he looked so fierce that Tom began to grow frightened.

"I didn't mean to treat you with any disrespect, sir," said Tom, in a much humbler tone than he had spoken in at first.

"Well, well," said the old fellow, "perhaps not—perhaps not. Tom——"

"Sir——"

"I know everything about you, Tom; everything. You're very poor, Tom."

"I certainly am," said Tom Smart. "But how came you to know that?"

"Never mind that," said the old gentleman; "you're much too fond of punch, Tom."

Tom Smart was just on the point of protesting that he hadn't tasted a drop since his last birthday, but when his eye encountered that of the old gentleman, he looked so knowing that Tom blushed, and was silent.

"Tom," said the old gentleman, "the widow's a fine woman—remarkably fine woman—eh, Tom?" Here the old fellow screwed up his eyes, cocked up one of his wasted little legs, and looked altogether so unpleasantly amorous, that Tom was quite disgusted with the levity of his behavior—at his time of life, too!

"I am her guardian, Tom," said the old gentleman.

"Are you?" inquired Tom Smart.

"I knew her mother, Tom," said the old fellow; "and her grandmother. She was very fond of me—made me this waistcoat, Tom."

"Did she?" said Tom Smart.

"And these shoes," said the old fellow, lifting up one of the red cloth mufflers; "but don't mention it, Tom. I shouldn't like to have it known that she was so much attached to me. It might occasion some unpleasantness in the family." When the old rascal said this, he looked so extremely impertinent, that, as Tom Smart afterward declared, he could have sat upon him without remorse.

"I have been a great favorite among the women in my time, Tom," said the profligate old debauchee;

"hundreds of fine women have sat in my lap for hours together. What do you think of that, you dog, eh!" The old gentleman was proceeding to recount some other exploits of his youth, when he was seized with such a violent fit of creaking that he was unable to proceed.

"Just serves you right, old boy," thought Tom Smart; but he didn't say anything.

"Ah!" said the old fellow; "I am a good deal troubled with this now. I am getting old, Tom, and have lost nearly all my rails. I have had an operation performed, too—a small piece let into my back—and I found it a severe trial, Tom."

"I dare say you did, sir," said Tom Smart.

"However," said the old gentleman, "that's not the point. Tom! I want you to marry the widow."

"Me, sir!" said Tom.

"You," said the old gentleman.

"Bless your reverend locks," said Tom—(he had a few scattered horse-hairs left)—"bless your reverend locks, she wouldn't have me." And Tom sighed involuntarily, as he thought of the bar.

"Wouldn't she?" said the old gentleman, firmly.

"No, no," said Tom; "there's somebody else in the wind. A tall man—a confoundedly tall man—with black whiskers."

"Tom," said the old gentleman; "she will never have him."

"Won't she?" said Tom. "If you stood in the bar, old gentleman, you'd tell another story."

"Pooh, pooh," said the old gentleman. "I know all about that."

"About what?" said Tom.

"The kissing behind the door, and all that sort of thing, Tom," said the old gentleman. And here he gave another impudent look, which made Tom very wroth, because, as you all know, gentlemen, to hear an old fellow, who ought to know better, talking about these things, is very unpleasant—nothing more so.

"I know all about that, Tom," said the old gentleman. "I have seen it done very often in my time, Tom, between more people than I should like to mention to you; but it never came to anything after all."

"You must have seen some queer things," said Tom, with an inquisitive look.

"You may say that, Tom," replied the old fellow, with a very complicated wink. "I am the last of my family, Tom," said the old gentleman, with a melancholy sigh.

"Was it a large one?" inquired Tom Smart.

"There were twelve of us, Tom," said the old gentleman; "fine straight-backed, handsome fellows as you'd wish to see. None of your modern abortions—all with arms, and with a degree of polish, though I say it that should not, which would have done your heart good to behold."

"And what's become of the others, sir?" asked Tom Smart.

The old gentleman applied his elbow to his eye as he replied, "Gone, Tom, gone. We had hard service, Tom, and they hadn't all my constitution. They got rheumatic about the legs and arms, and went into kitchens and other hospitals; and one of 'em, with long service and hard usage, positively lost his senses:—he got so crazy that he was obliged to be burned. Shocking thing that, Tom."

"Dreadful!" said Tom Smart.

The old fellow paused for a few minutes, apparently struggling with his feelings of emotion, and then said:

"However, Tom, I am wandering from the point. This tall man, Tom, is a rascally adventurer. The moment he married the widow, he would sell off all the furniture, and run away. What would be the consequence? She would be deserted and

reduced to ruin, and I should catch my death of cold in some broker's shop."

"Yes, but——"

"Don't interrupt me," said the old gentleman. "Of you, Tom, I entertain a very different opinion; for I well know that if you once settled yourself in a public house, you would never leave it as long as there was anything to drink within its walls."

"I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion, sir," said Tom Smart.

"Therefore," resumed the old gentleman, in a dictatorial tone; "you shall have her, and he shall not."

"What is to prevent it?" said Tom Smart, eagerly.

"This disclosure," replied the old gentleman; "he is already married."

"How can I prove it?" said Tom, starting half out of bed.

The old gentleman untucked his arm from his side, and having pointed to one of the oaken presses, immediately replaced it in its old position.

"He little thinks," said the old gentleman, "that in the right-hand pocket of a pair of trousers in that press, he has left a letter, entreating him to return to his disconsolate wife, with six—mark me, Tom—six babes, and all of them small ones."

As the old gentleman solemnly uttered these words, his features grew less and less distinct, and his figure more shadowy. A film came over Tom Smart's eyes. The old man seemed gradually blending into the chair, the damask waistcoat to resolve into a cushion, the red slippers to shrink into little red cloth bags. The light faded gently away, and Tom Smart fell back on his pillow, and dropped asleep.

MORNING aroused Tom from the lethargic slumber into which he had fallen on the disappearance of the old man. He sat up in bed, and for some minutes vainly tried to recall the events of the preceding night. Suddenly they rushed upon him. He looked at the chair; it was a fantastic and grim-looking piece of furniture, certainly, but it must have been a remarkably ingenious and lively imagination that could have discovered any resemblance between it and an old man.

"How are you, old boy?" said Tom. He was bolder in the daylight—most men are.

The chair remained motionless, and spoke not a word.

"Miserable morning," said Tom. No. The chair would not be drawn into conversation.

"Which press did you point to?—you can tell me that," said Tom. Devil a word, gentlemen, the chair would say.

"It's not much trouble to open it, anyhow," said Tom, getting out of bed very deliberately. He walked up to one of the presses. The key was in the lock; he turned it, and opened the door. There *was* a pair of trousers there. He put his hand into the pocket, and drew forth the identical letter the old gentleman had described!

"Queer sort of thing, this," said Tom Smart; looking first at the chair and then at the press, and then at the letter, and then at the chair again. "Very queer," said Tom. But, as there was nothing in either to lessen the queerness, he thought he might as well dress himself, and settle the tall man's business at once—just to put him out of his misery.

Tom surveyed the rooms he passed through, on his way downstairs, with the scrutinizing eye of a landlord; thinking it not impossible, that before long, they and their contents would be his property. The tall man was standing in the snug little bar, with his hands behind him, quite at home. He grinned vacantly at Tom. A casual observer might have sup-

posed he did it, only to show his white teeth; but Tom Smart thought that a consciousness of triumph was passing through the place where the tall man's mind would have been, if he had had any. Tom laughed in his face; and summoned the landlady.

"Good morning, ma'am," said Tom Smart, closing the door of the little parlor as the widow entered.

"Good morning, sir," said the widow. "What will you take for breakfast, sir?"

Tom was thinking how he should open the case, so he made no answer.

"There's a very nice ham," said the widow, "and a beautiful cold larded fowl. Shall I send 'em in, sir?"

These words roused Tom from his reflections. His admiration of the widow increased as she spoke. Thoughtful creature! Comfortable provider!

"Who is that gentleman in the bar, ma'am?" inquired Tom.

"His name is Jinkins, sir," said the widow, slightly blushing.

"He's a tall man," said Tom.

"He is a very fine man, sir," replied the widow, "and a very nice gentleman."

"Ah!" said Tom.

"Is there anything more you want, sir?" inquired the widow, rather puzzled by Tom's manner.

"Why, yes," said Tom. "My dear ma'am, will you have the kindness to sit down for one moment?"

The widow looked much amazed, but she sat down, and Tom sat down too, close beside her. I don't know how it happened, gentlemen—indeed my uncle used to tell me that Tom Smart said *he* didn't know how it happened either—but somehow or other the palm of Tom's hand fell upon the back of the widow's hand, and remained there while he spoke.

"My dear ma'am," said Tom Smart—he had always a great notion of committing the amiable—"My dear ma'am, you deserve a very excellent husband; you do indeed."

"Lor', sir!" said the widow—as well she might: Tom's mode of commencing the conversation being rather unusual, not to say startling; the fact of his never having set eyes upon her before the previous night, being taken into consideration. "Lor', sir!"

"I scorn to flatter, my dear ma'am," said Tom Smart. "You deserve a very admirable husband, and whoever he is, he'll be a very lucky man." As Tom said this his eye involuntarily wandered from the widow's face, to the comforts around him.

The widow looked more puzzled than ever, and made an effort to rise. Tom gently pressed her hand, as if to detain her, and she kept her seat. Widows, gentlemen, are not usually timorous, as my uncle used to say.

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you, sir, for your good opinion," said the buxom landlady, half laughing; "and if ever I marry again——"

"*If*," said Tom Smart, looking very shrewdly out of the right-hand corner of his left eye. "*If*——"

"Well," said the widow, laughing outright this time. "*When* I do, I hope I shall have as good a husband as you describe."

"Jinkins to wit," said Tom.

"Lor', sir!" exclaimed the widow.

"Oh, don't tell me," said Tom, "I know him."

"I am sure nobody who knows him, knows anything bad of him," said the widow, bridling up at the mysterious air with which Tom had spoken.

"Hem!" said Tom Smart.

The widow began to think it was high time to cry, so she took out her handkerchief, and inquired whether Tom wished to insult her; whether he thought it like a gentleman to take away the character of

another gentleman behind his back; why, if he had got anything to say, he didn't say it to the man, like a man, instead of terrifying a poor weak woman in that way; and so forth.

"I'll say it to him fast enough," said Tom, "only I want you to hear it first."

"What is it?" inquired the widow, looking intently in Tom's countenance.

"I'll astonish you," said Tom, putting his hand in his pocket.

"If it is that he wants money," said the widow, "I know that already, and you needn't trouble yourself."

"Pooh, nonsense, that's nothing," said Tom Smart. "*I* want money. 'Taint that."

"Oh, dear, what can it be?" exclaimed the poor widow.

"Don't be frightened," said Tom Smart. He slowly drew forth the letter, and unfolded it. "You won't scream?" said Tom, doubtfully.

"No, no," replied the widow; "let me see it."

"You won't go fainting away, or any of that nonsense?" said Tom.

"No, no," returned the widow, hastily.

"And don't run out, and blow him up," said Tom, "because I'll do all that for you; you had better not exert yourself."

"Well, well," said the widow, "let me see it."

"I will," replied Tom Smart; and, with these words, he placed the letter in the widow's hand.

GENTLEMEN, I have heard my uncle say, that Tom Smart said, the widow's lamentations when she heard the disclosure would have pierced a heart of stone. Tom was certainly very tender-hearted, but they pierced his to the very core. The widow rocked herself to and fro, and wrung her hands.

"Oh, the deception and villainy of man!" said the widow.

"Frightful, my dear ma'am; but compose yourself," said Tom Smart.

"Oh, I can't compose myself," shrieked the widow. "I shall never find anyone else I can love so much!"

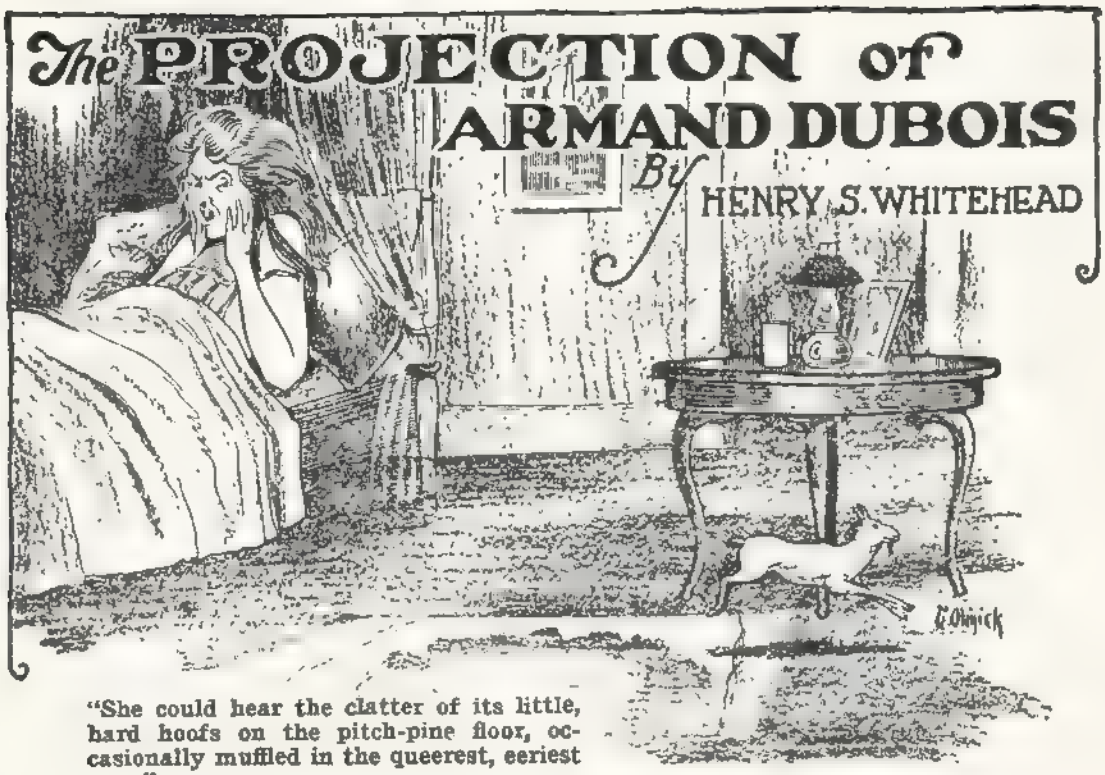
"Oh yes you will, my dear soul," said Tom Smart, letting fall a shower of the largest-sized tears, in pity for the widow's misfortunes. Tom Smart, in the energy of his compassion, had put his arm round the widow's waist; and the widow, in a passion of grief, had clasped Tom's hand. She looked up in Tom's face, and smiled through her tears. Tom looked down in hers, and smiled through his.

I never could find out, gentlemen, whether Tom did or did not kiss the widow at that particular moment. He used to tell my uncle he didn't, but I have my doubts about it. Between ourselves, gentlemen, I rather think he did.

At all events, Tom kicked the very tall man out at the front door half an hour after, and married the widow a month after. And he used to drive about the country, with the clay-colored gig with red wheels, and the vixenish mare with the fast pace, till he gave up business many years afterward, and went to France with his wife; and then the old house was pulled down.

The PROJECTION of ARMAND DUBOIS

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD



"She could hear the clatter of its little, hard hoofs on the pitch-pine floor, occasionally muffled in the queerest, eeriest way."

SOME time before my marriage, when I was living in Marlborough House, the old mansion on the hill back of the town of Frederiksted, on the West Indian island of St. Croix,—that is to say, before I became a landed-proprietor, as I did later, and was still making a variable living by the production and sale of my tales,—I had a next-door neighbor by the name of Mrs. Minerva Du Chaillu. I do not know whether the late Monsieur Du Chaillu, of whom this good lady was the relict, was related or not to the famous Paul of that name, that slaughterer of wild animals in the far corners of the earth, who was, and may still be, for all I know, the greatest figure of all the big game hunters, but her husband, Monsieur Placide Du Chaillu, had been for many years a clergyman of the English Church on that strange island of St. Martin, with its two flat towns, Phillipsbourg, capital of the Dutch Side, and Maragot, capital of the French Side.

The English Church was, and still is, existent only among the Dutch residents, Maragot being without an English Church. Therefore, Mrs. Du Chaillu's acquaintance, even after many years' residence on St. Martin, was almost entirely confined to the Dutch Side, where, curiously enough, English and French, rather than Dutch, are spoken, and which, although only eight miles from the French capital, has only slight communication therewith, because of the execrable quality of the connecting roads.

This old lady, well past seventy at the time, used to sit on her gallery late afternoons, when the fervor of the afternoon sun had somewhat abated, and rock herself steadily to and fro, and fan in the same inde-

fatigable fashion as ancient Mistress Desmond, my landlady. Occasionally I would step across and exchange the time of day with her. I had known her for several years before she got her courage up to the point of asking me if some day I would not allow her to see some things I had written.

Such a request is always a compliment, and this I told her, to relieve her obvious embarrassment. A day or so later I took over to Mrs. Du Chaillu a selection of three or four manuscript-carbons, and a couple of magazines containing my stories, and I could see her from time to time, afternoons, reading them. I could even guess which ones she had finished and which she was currently engaged in perusing, by the expression of her kindly face as she read.

Four or five days later she sent for me, and when I had gone across to her gallery, she thanked me, very formally as a finely-bred gentlewoman of several generations of West Indian background might be expected to do, handed back the stories, and, with much hesitation, and almost blushingly, intimated that she could tell me a story herself, if I cared to use it!

"Of course," added Mrs. Du Chaillu, "you'd have to change it about and embellish it a great deal, Mr. Canevin."

To this I said nothing, except to urge my old friend to proceed, and this she did forthwith, hesitating at first, then, becoming intrigued by the memories of the tale, with the flair of a quite unexpected narrative gift. During the first few minutes of the then halting recital, I interrupted occasionally, for the purpose of getting this or that point clear, but as the story progressed I quieted down, and before it was finished, I was sitting, listening as though to catch pearls, for here was my simon-pure West Indian "Jumbee" story, a gem, a perfect example, and told—you may believe me or not, sir or madam—with every possible indication of authenticity. Unless there is something hitherto unsuspected (even by his best friends, those keenest of critics) with the understanding apparatus of Gerald Canevin, that story as Mrs. Du Chaillu told it to him, had happened, just as she said it had—to her.

I will add only that I have not, to my knowledge, changed a word of it. It is not only not embellished (or "glorified," as the Black People would say) but it is as nearly verbatim as I can manage it; and I believe it implicitly. It fits in with much that is known scientifically and verified by occult investigators and suchlike personages; it is typically, utterly, West Indian; and Mrs. Du Chaillu would as soon vary one jot or tittle from the strict truth in this or any other matter, as to attempt to stand on her head,—and that, if you knew the dear old soul as I do, with her rheumatism, and her seventy-six years, and her impeccable, lifelong respectability, is as much as to say, impossible! For the convenience of any possible readers, I will tell her story for her, as nearly as possible in her own words, without quotation marks. . . .

I HAD been living in Phillipsbourg about two years; perhaps slightly longer [said Mrs. Du Chaillu] when one morning I had occasion to go into my husband's study, or office. Monsieur Du Chaillu—as he was generally called, of course, even though he was a clergyman of the Church of England—was, at the moment of my arrival, opening one of the two "strong-boxes," or old-fashioned iron safes which he had standing side by side, and in which he kept his own money and the various parish funds of which he had charge.

The occasion of my going into his office, where he received the parish-

oners—you know in these West Indian parishes the Black People come in streams to consult "Gahd's An'-inted" about every conceivable matter from a family row to a stolen papaya—was on account of Julie. Julie was a very good and reliable servant, a young woman whose health was not very good, and whom I was keeping in one of the spare-rooms of our house. The rectory was a large residence, just next-door to the Government House, and poor Julie did better, we thought, inside than in one of the servant's rooms in the yard. Every day I would give Julie a little brandy. She had come for her brandy a few minutes before—it was about 4:30 in the afternoon—and I discovered that I would have to get a fresh bottle. Monsieur Du Chaillu was in the office and had the key of the big sideboard, and I had stepped in to get the key from him.

As I say, he was just opening one of the safes.

I said: "Placide, what are you doing?" It was one of those meaningless questions. I could see clearly what he was doing. He was opening his safe, the one in which he kept his own private belongings, and I need not have asked so obvious a question.

My husband straightened up, however, not annoyed, you understand, but somewhat surprized, because I never entered his office as a rule, and remarked that he was getting some money out because he had a bill to pay that afternoon.

I asked him for the key to the sideboard and came and stood beside him as he reached down into the safe, which was the kind that opened with a great heavy lid on the top, like a cigar-box, or the cover for a cistern. He reached into his pocket with his left hand after the sideboard key, his right hand full of currency, and I looked into the safe. There on top lay a paper which I took to be a kind of promissory note. I read it, hastily. I was his wife. There was, I conceived, nothing secret about it.

"What is this, Placide?" I enquired.

My husband handed me the key of the sideboard.

"What is what, my dear Minerva?" he asked.

"This note, or whatever it is. It seems as though you had loaned three hundred dollars a good while ago, and never got it back."

"That is correct," said my husband. "I have never felt that I wished to push the matter." He picked up the note with his now free left hand, in a ruminating kind of manner, and I saw there was another note underneath. I picked that one up myself, my husband making no objection to my doing so, and glanced through it. That, too, was for three hundred dollars. Both were dated between seventeen and eighteen years previously, that is, in the year 1863, although they were of different months and days, and both were signed by men at that time living in Phillipsbourg, both prosperous men; one a white gentleman-planter in a small way; the other a colored man with a not very good reputation, but one who had prospered and was accounted well-to-do.

Well, my husband stood there with one note in his hand, and I stood beside him, holding the other. I did a rough sum in mental arithmetic. The notes were "demand" notes, at eight per cent, simple interest, representing, the two together, six hundred dollars. Eighteen years of interest, at eight per cent added on, it seemed to me, would cause these notes to amount to a great deal more than twice six hundred dollars, something around fifteen hundred, in fact. We were far from rich!

"But, my dear Placide, you should collect these," I cried.

"I have never wished to press them," replied my husband.

"Allow me, if you please, to take them," I begged him.

"Do as you wish, Minerva my dear," replied Monsieur Du Chaillu. "But, I beg of you, no lawsuits!"

"Very well," said I, and, carrying the two notes, walked out of the office to get Julie her brandy, out of the sideboard in the dining room.

I will admit to you, Mr. Canevin, that I was a little put out about my dear husband's carelessness in connection with those notes. At the same time, I could not avoid seeing very clearly that the notes, if still collectible, constituted a kind of windfall, as you say in the United States—it has to do with a variety of apple, does it not?—and I decided at once to set about a kind of investigation.

As soon as I had supplied Julie with the brandy which Dr. Duchesne had prescribed for her, I sent our house-boy after Monsieur Henkes, the notary of our town of Phillipsbourg. Monsieur Henkes came within the hour—he stayed for tea, I remember—and he assured me that the notes, not yet being twenty years old, were still collectible. I placed them in his hands, and paid him, in advance, as the custom is on St. Martin, and, I daresay, in Curaçoa, and the other Dutch possessions, his fee of fifty dollars for collection, instructing him that it was my husband's desire that there should be no actual lawsuit.

I will shorten my story as much as possible, by telling you that the note which had been given by the gentleman-planter was paid, in six months, in two equal installments, and, with my husband's permission, I invested the money in some shares in one of our St. Martin Salt-Ponds,—salt, you know, is the chief export from St. Martin.

The other note, the one which had been given by the colored man, Armand Dubois, did not go through so easily. Here in the West Indies, as you have surely observed, our "colored" people, as distinct from the Black laboring class, are, commonly, estimable persons, who conduct themselves like us Caucasians. Dubois, however, was exceptional. He was only about one-quarter African—a quadroon, or thereabouts. But his leanings, as sometimes happens, were to the Black side of his heredity. Many persons in Phillipsbourg regarded him as a rascal, a person of no character at all. It seems he had heard, far back, in the days when my husband accommodated his friend, the planter, of that transaction, and had come almost at once to ask for a similar accommodation. That is why the two notes were so nearly of the same date, and perhaps it accounts for the fact that the two notes were both for three hundred dollars. Negroes, and those persons of mixed blood whose Black side predominates, are not very inventive. It would be quite characteristic for such a person to ask for the same sum as had been given to the former applicant.

Dubois made a great pother about paying. Of this I heard only rumors, of course. Monsieur Henkes did not trouble us in the matter, once the collection of the notes had been placed in his hands. It was, of course, a perfectly clear case. The note had been signed by Dubois, and it had more than two years to run before it would be outlawed,—"limited" is, I believe, the legal term. So Armand Dubois paid, as he was well able to do, but, as I say, with a very bad grace. Presumably he expected never to pay. The impudence of the man!

SHORTLY after I had placed the notes in the hands of Monsieur Henkes for collection, Julie came to me one afternoon, quite gray in the face, as negroes look when they are badly frightened. On St. Martin, perhaps you know, Mr. Canevin, servants have a custom similar to what I have read about in your South. That

is to say, they invariably address their mistresses as "Miss," with the Christian name. Why, I can not say. It is their custom. Julie came to me, as I say, very frightened, very much upset,—quite terrified, in fact.

She said to me: "Miss Minerva, on no account, ma'am, mus' yo' go to de door, if yo' please, ma'am. One Armand Dubois come, ma'am, an' is even now cloimbing de step of de gol'ry. Hoide yo'self, ma'am, I beg of yo', in de name of Gahd!"

Julie's distress and state of fright, which the girl could not conceal, impressed me more than her words. I said: "Julie, go to the door yourself. Say, please, to this Dubois, that I have nothing to say to him. For anything whatever, he must address himself to Monsieur Henkes."

"Yes, ma'am," replied Julie, and almost pushed me into my bedroom and shut the door smartly behind me. I stood there, and listened, as Dubois, who had now mounted the gallery steps, knocked, very truculently, it seemed to me,—the creature had no manners,—on the door. I could hear him ask for me, and the murmur of Julie's voice as she delivered my message. Dubois was reluctant to leave, it seemed. He stood and parleyed, but forcing his way into a house like the rectory of the English Church was beyond him, and at last he went. Several other persons, black fellows, Julie told me, had accompanied him, for what purpose I can not imagine, —it was most unusual that he should come to trouble me at all,—and these all walked down the street, as I could see through the slanted jalousies of my bedroom window, Dubois gesticulating and orating to his followers.

Julie told me something else, too, —something which quite made my blood run cold. Armand Dubois, said Julie, had, half-concealed in his hand, as he stood talking to her, a small vial. Julie was sure it contained vitriol. I was almost afraid to venture out to the street after that, and it was a long time before I recovered from the shock of it. Vitriol, —think of it, Mr. Canevin!—if indeed that were what he had in the vial; and what else could he have had?

Of course, I did not dare tell my husband. It would have distressed that dear, kind man most atrociously; and besides, the collection of the notes was, so to speak, a venture of mine, carried out, if not exactly against his will, at least without any enthusiasm on his part. So I kept quiet, and commanded Julie to say nothing whatever about it. I was sure, too, that even a person like Armand Dubois would, in a short time, get over the condition of rage in which Monsieur Henkes' visit to him must have left him to induce him to come to me at all. That, or something similar, actually proved to be the case. I had no further annoyance from Dubois, and in the course of a few weeks, probably pressed by Monsieur Henkes, he settled the note, paying seven hundred and twenty-four dollars, to be exact, with seventeen years and eight months' interest at eight per cent.

Of course, Mr. Canevin, all that portion of the story, except, perhaps, for Armand Dubois' unpleasant visit, is merely commonplace,—the mere narrative of the collection of two demand-notes. Note, though, what followed!

It was, perhaps, two months after the day when I had gone into my husband's office and discovered those notes, and about a month after Dubois had paid what he owed Monsieur Du Chaillu, that I had gone to bed, a trifle earlier, perhaps, than usual,—about half-past 9, to be exact. My aunt was staying with us in the rectory at the time, and she was far from well, and I had been reading to her

and fanning her, and I was somewhat tired. I fell asleep, I suppose, immediately after retiring.

I awakened, and found myself sitting bolt-upright in my bed, and the clock in the town was striking 12. I counted the strokes. As I finished, and the bell ceased its striking, I *felt*, rather than saw,—for I was looking, in an abstracted kind of fashion, straight before me, my elbows on my knees, in a sitting posture, as I have said,—something at the left, just outside the mosquito-netting. There was a dim night-light, such as I always kept, in the far corner of the room, on the edge of my bureau, and by its light the objects in the room were faintly visible through the white net.

I turned, suddenly, under the impulse of that feeling, and there, Mr. Canevin, just beside the bed, and almost pressing against the net though not quite touching it, was a face. The face was that of a mulatto, and as I looked at it, frozen, speechless, I observed that it was Armand Dubois, and that he was glaring at me, with an expression of the most horrible malignancy that could be imagined. The lips were drawn back,—like an animal's, Mr. Canevin,—but the most curious, and perhaps the most terrifying, aspect of the situation, was the fact that the face was on a level with the bed, that is, the chin seemed to rest against the edge of the mattress, so that, as it occurred to me, the man must be sitting on the floor, his legs placed under the bed, so as to bring his horrible, leering face in that position I have described.

I tried to scream, and my voice was utterly dried up. Then, moved by what impulse I can not describe, I plunged toward the face, tore loose the netting on that side, and looked directly at it.

Mr. Canevin, there was nothing there, but, as I moved abruptly toward it, I saw a vague, dim hand and arm swing up from below, and there was the strangest sensation! It was as though, over my face and shoulders and breast, hot and stinging drops had been cast. There was, for just a passing instant, the most dreadful burning, searing sensation, and then it was gone. I half sat, half lay, a handful of the netting in my hands, where I had torn it loose from where it had been tucked under the edge of the mattress, and there was nothing there,—nothing whatever; I passed my hand over my face and neck, but there was nothing; no burns,—nothing.

I do not know how I managed to do it, but I climbed out of the bed, and looked underneath. Mr. Canevin, there was nothing, no man, nor anything, there. I walked over and turned up the night-light, and looked all about the room. Nothing. The jalousies were all fastened, as usual. The door was locked. There were no other means of ingress or egress.

I went back to bed, convinced that I must have been dreaming or sleep-walking, or something of the sort, although I had never walked in my sleep, and almost never dreamed or remembered any dream. I could not sleep, and it occurred to me that I would do well to get up again, put on my bathrobe, and go out to the dining room for a drink of water. The water stood, in earthenware "gugglets," just beside a doorway that led out to a small gallery at the side of the house,—which stood on the corner,—in the wind, so as to keep cool. You've seen that, a good many times, even here, of course. On St. Martin we had no ice-plant in those days, nor yet, so far as I know, and everybody kept the drinking-water in gugglets and set the gugglets where the wind would blow on them and cool the water.

I took a glass from the sideboard, filled it, and drank the water. Then I opened the door just beside me, and stood looking out for a few minutes.

The town was absolutely silent at that hour. There was no moon, and the streets were lighted just as they were here in Frederiksted before we had electricity, with occasional hurricane lanterns at the corners. The one on our corner was burning steadily, and except for the howling of a dog somewhere in the town, everything was absolutely quiet and peaceful, Mr. Canevin.

I went back to bed, and fell asleep immediately. At any rate I have no recollection of lying there hoping for sleep.

Then, immediately afterward, it seemed, I was awakened a second time. This time I was not sitting up when I came to my waking senses, but it did not take me very long to sit up, I can assure you! For the most extraordinary thing was happening in my bedroom.

In the exact center of the room there stood a round, mahogany table. Around and around that table, a small goat was running, from right to left,—that is, as I looked toward the table, the goat was running away from me around to the right, and coming back at the left. I could hear the clatter of its little, hard hoofs on the pitch-pine floor, occasionally muffled in the queerest, eeriest way,—it sounds like nothing in the telling, of course,— when the goat would step on the small rug on which the table stood. I could see its great, shining eyes, like green moons, every time it came around to the left.

I watched the thing, fascinated, and a slow horror began to grow upon me. I think I swooned, for the last thing I remember is my senses leaving me, but it must have been a very light fainting fit, Mr. Canevin, for I aroused myself, and the room was absolutely silent.

I was shaking all over as though I had been having an attack of the quartan ague, but I managed once more to slip under the netting, reach for my bathrobe, and go over and turn up the night-light. I observed that the door of my bedroom was standing open, and I went through it and back to the dining room, as I had done the first time. I felt very uncomfortable, shaken and nervous, as you may well imagine, but there in the next room I knew my husband was sleeping, and my poor old aunt on the other side of the hall, and I plucked up my courage. I knew that *he* would never be afraid, of anything, man or—anything else, Mr. Canevin!

I FOUND that I must have been more upset than I had supposed, for the door out onto the small gallery from the dining room, where I had stood the other time, was unfastened, and half open, and I realized that I had left it in that condition, and I saw clearly that the young goat had simply wandered in. Goats and dogs and other animals roamed the streets there, even pigs, much as they do here, although all the islands have police regulations, and on St. Martin these were not enforced nearly as well as they are here on St. Croix. So I laughed at myself and my fears, although I think I had a right at least to be startled by that goat dancing about my bedroom table, and I fastened the door leading outside, and came back into my bedroom, and fastened that door too, and went back to bed once more. My last waking sensation was of that dog, or some other, howling, somewhere in the town.

Well, that was destined to be a bad night, Mr. Canevin. I remember one of my husband's sermons, Mr. Canevin, on the text: "A Good Day." I do not remember what portion of the Scriptures it comes from, but I remember the text, and the sermon too. Afterward, it occurred to me that that night, that "bad night," was the direct opposite; a mère whimsy of

mine, but I always think of that night as "the bad night," somehow.

For, Mr. Canevin, that was not all. No. I had noticed the time before I returned to bed that time, and it was a little past 1 o'clock. I had slept for an hour, you see, after the first interruption.

When I was awakened again it was 5 o'clock in the morning. Remember, I had, deliberately, and in a state of full wakefulness, closed and fastened both the door from that side gallery into the dining room, and the bedroom door. The jalousies had not been touched at any time, and all of them were fastened.

I awoke with the most terrible impression of evil and horror: it was as though I stood alone in the midst of a hostile world, bent upon my destruction. It was the most dreadful feeling,—a feeling of complete, of unrecoverable, depression.

And there, coming through my bedroom door,—*through* the door, Mr. Canevin, which remained shut and locked,—was Armand Dubois. He was a tall, slim man, and he stalked in, looking taller and slimmer than ever, because he was wearing one of those old-fashioned, long, white nightshirts, which fell to his ankles. He walked, as I say, through the closed door, and straight toward me, and, Mr. Canevin, the expression on his face was the expression of one of the demons from hell.

I half sat up, utterly horrified, incapable of speech, or even of thought beyond that numbing horror, and as I sat up, Armand Dubois seemed to pause. His advance slowed abruptly, the expression of malignant hatred seemed to become intensified, and then he slowly turned to his left, and, keeping his face turned toward me, walked, very slowly now, straight through the side-wall of my bedroom, and was gone, Mr. Canevin.

Then I screamed, again and again, and Placide, my husband, bursting the door, rushed in, and over his shoulder and through the broken door I could see Julie's terrified face, and my poor old aunt, a Shetland shawl huddled about her poor shoulders, coming gropingly out of her bedroom.

That was the last I remembered then. When I came to, it was broad daylight and past 7, and Dr. Duchesne was there, holding his fingers against my wrist, counting the pulse, I suppose, and there was a strong taste of brandy in my mouth.

They made me stay in bed all through the morning, and Dr. Duchesne would not allow me to talk. I had wanted to tell Placide and him all that had happened to me through the night, but at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, when I was allowed to get up at last, after having eaten some broth, I had had time to think, and I never mentioned what I had heard and seen that night.

No, Mr. Canevin, my dear husband never heard it, never knew what had cast me into that condition of "nerves." After he died I told Dr. Duchesne, and Dr. Duchesne made no particular comment. Like all doctors, and the clergy here in the West Indies, such matters were an old story to him!

It was fortunate for us that he happened to be passing the house and came in because he saw the lights, and could hear Julie weeping hysterically. He realized that something extraordinary had happened, or was happening, in the rectory, and that he might be needed.

He was on his way home from the residence of Armand Dubois, there in the town. Dubois had been attacked by some obscure tropical fever, just before midnight, and had died at 5 o'clock that morning, Mr. Canevin.

Dr. Duchesne told me, later, about Dubois' case, which interested him very much from his professional viewpoint. Dr. Duchesne said that there were still strange fevers, not

only in obscure places in the world, but right here in our civilized islands, —think of it! He said that he could not tell so much as the name of the fever that had taken Dubois away. But he said the most puzzling of the symptoms was, that just at midnight Dubois had fallen into a state of coma,—unconsciousness, you know,—which had lasted only a minute or two; quite extraordinary, the doctor said, and that a little later, soon after 1 o'clock, he had shut his eyes, and quieted down,—he had been raving, muttering and tossing about, as fever patients do, you know, and that there had come over his face the most wicked and dreadful grimace, and that he had drummed with his fingers against his own forehead, an irregular kind of drumming, a beat, the doctor said, not unlike the scampering footfalls of some small, four-footed animal. . . .

He died, as I told you, at 5, quite suddenly, and Dr. Duchesne said that just as he was going there came over his face the most horrible, the most malignant expression that he had ever seen. He said it caused him to shudder, although he knew, of course, that it was only the muscles of the man's face contracting,—*rigor mortis*, it is called, I think, Mr. Canevin. . . .

Dr. Duchesne said, too, that there was a scientific word which described the situation,—that is, the possible connection between Dubois as he lay dying with that queer fever, and the appearances to me. It was not "telepathy," Mr. Canevin, of that I am certain. I wish I could remember the word, but I fear it has escaped my poor old memory!

"Was it 'projection?'" I asked Mrs. Du Chaillu.

"I think that was it, Mr. Canevin," said Mrs. Du Chaillu, and nodded her head at me, wisely.

Note.—"The Shadows," another of Henry S. Whitehead's stories of the West Indies, will be published soon.

The Coffin of Lissa

***By* AUGUST W. DERLETH**

THE horror of the sentence overwhelmed me; it fell upon me as the black cloak of night descending on the earth absorbed the light—so it heralded the expiration of my life. I was dazed, speechless with the portent of the verdict. The black-robed judges seemed blurred to my sight as I rose and was taken from the chamber to make room for another poor wretch. Outside, night had fallen, and the murk of the darkness still further depressed my sunken spirits. Through the pall of gloom I could discern no ray of hope. I was doomed! Doomed to die by torture, the slow torture of the iron coffin! The final words of the inquisitors reverberated hollowly in the chambers of my benumbed mind.

Slowly the first shock passed, and slowly I became conscious of my surroundings. My captors were leading me through a long passageway. A few candles glimmered feebly in their brackets at the end of the ill-lighted corridor. In a few moments I faced the iron door of the torture chamber. As the heavy door creaked backward on its rusty hinges, the gleam of the flickering candles cast fitful, menacing shadows on the dreaded coffin in the center of the chamber. The sight filled me with renewed horror and I

was seized with a fierce desire for freedom. But the futile struggle that I essayed was immediately frustrated by my guards, whose strength far exceeded mine. I was roughly thrown into the instrument of torture, from which the lid had been removed. Suddenly my head struck something unyielding and I lapsed into unconsciousness.

From then on I knew but hazily what occurred. When I awoke, my sight encountered nought save Stygian darkness. For a space I lay quiet, summoning to my aid all my faculties. Try as I might I could not pierce the blackness. It now seemed to swirl and eddy before my eyes, and often I closed them for the relief of immovable darkness. Now suddenly I bethought myself of moving my arms. But the attempt resulted in a sharp pain at the juncture of arm and shoulder. This, thought I, could be caused by no other agency than the clamps that I had so often heard of from witnesses of an execution. At that preclusion to my efforts the remembrance of the proceedings of some time past came upon me like a huge wave of ocean and swept away all the remnants of thoughts that I had been collecting, leaving nothing but fear, stark terror, despair. I realized where I was and with the realization came the thought of unhindered death. I was in the terrible iron coffin of Lissa, from which no man had ever escaped! I began to breathe heavily, and I could feel cold beads of sweat on my brow. I raved, I shouted in rage, I swore terrible oaths, oaths of vengeance against Torquemada, the Grand Inquisitor. But my exertions were too much for me and I was forced to sink back in exhaustion.

Shortly after, a reaction set in and I lay quiet, contemplating my untimely end. I strained my ears for any sounds that might meet them. For a space I heard nought save my irregular breathing, then another sound impinged upon my ears. It was a soft padding sound, a very soft sound, scarcely audible. I listened attentively and attempted to find what occasioned it. It stopped at intervals; it resumed almost at once. Then no sound reached me for some little time, but suddenly I felt a sharp, stinging sensation in my right hand. I strove to draw it toward me, but the sharp pain in my shoulder was augmented with each movement of my arm. I groaned aloud. My arms had been drawn through apertures in the sides of the coffin; they had been chained to the stone floor *for the rats to gnaw upon!*

Again and again I shrieked, but the more often I did so, the more acutely did I realize the utter futility of my efforts. I should not be heard here, so far underground; even if I were heard, no one would liberate me. I sighed, and once more sank back to my rough bed exhausted. The rats were gone now, frightened, no doubt, by my wild screams of terror. But poignantly I realized that they must eventually return. I lowered my eyelids and began to mumble a silent prayer, but I was rudely interrupted.

A new sound, a sound fraught with more dangers and horrors than any I had heard heretofore, reached my ears. A light sound, barely coherent —yet it was there. A creaking sound, slow, in truth, and not continuous, but its portent flung me again into the wildest throes of terror. The sound of the slow, sure descent of the coffin lid! This was the climax of the ghastly tortures I was to undergo. I raised my head to find if I could touch the oncoming lid. But I could not, and the clawing pain in my shoulders as the steel clamps sank into my flesh, caused me to sit back again as quickly as I could. The lid, then, was some distance away, and I had a few hours of grace.

The certainty of death threw open

the gates to my memory. I thought of my mistress and of my innocent children, and I sobbed despondently. I traversed and retraversed my entire life from the beginning of my miserable existence to this experience of horror. Gradually my sobs quieted and I had recourse in my God.

For about the space of a glass of sand I lay imperturbably, my lips moving in prayer. Then I became cognizant of the proximity of the lid. I did not again endeavor to reach the cover with my head after my former racking experience, but I resorted to another means of finding its proximity. I summoned what feeble strength I had left and forcibly blew air upward. At once I felt a draft on my face; the air had returned at the propinquity of the lid. At this discovery I sought to compose the feeling of haunting alarm which rose within me, but hardly had I attempted to do so, when a biting sensation in my hands and arms acquainted me with the return of the rats, increased in number. I shrieked and screamed to scare them off, but to no avail, for they attacked me as before.

Simultaneously with these dire occurrences a revolting nausea took possession of my senses. The air had become so foul that it oppressed me with its obnoxious poison. Cold sweat stood out in great beads upon my forehead. All my strength had deserted me; I could no longer even sob, and my breathing became more and more difficult as the lid came down. My imagination began to conjure up before me horrible visions. I believed that I saw Torquemada laughing delightedly at my sorry plight; I imagined Satan grinning at me, watching greedily for my soul. There were others, too, horrible faces leering at me through the gloom. I shut my eyes but I could not shut out these damnable sights. They grew upon me, they assumed ghastly proportions, their faces twisted into horrible gargoylesque counterparts; gradually they merged into a vague, indistinct, grotesque mass, and were swirled away by the eddying darkness.

I could feel the lid now, lightly at first, for it advanced but slowly. A space passed, and the pressure began to pain me. Then came to me a last great power, and I shouted and raved, swearing horribly, until the sweat rolled down my cheeks in great drops. The pressure became more and more pronounced, the air more obnoxious, the gnawing more persistent, the racking pain in my shoulders more torturous with each twitch, and at length I became oblivious of all.

WHAT am I doing here? Was I not in the iron coffin? Have I died and come to life?

The sun casts long patches of light upon the stone floor of my cell, and forms a network of conflicting shadows with the aid of the heavy bars at my window. My clothes are torn, bedraggled. I lack three fingers of the right hand, and one and a half of another of the left.

Why is my food reached toward me at the end of a pole? Why is the door of this room never opened? Why does my keeper hurl disgusting epithets at me every time he nears me? What is the meaning of all this? Why am I called such unbearable, bestial names? Above all, why am I so unjustly called that which is most oft repeated, that which, of all, I deserve the least?

"Lunatic!"

At this word there comes upon me again that horrible nausea that attacked me in the coffin of Lissa, and I shriek in terror as those memories surge over me like the resistless waves of ocean. And as my screams reverberate down the corridor, answering screams come from other cells—and my keeper laughs and shouts filthy curses at me.

An Odd Little Story Is

Seven Minutes

By FRANK OWEN

WHEN Dr. Gordon Winwood gave up his splendid practise on Upper Fifth Avenue and left the city, it was a great surprize to his friends. He gave no reason for his leaving nor did he acquaint anyone with his destination. He simply disappeared from his usual haunts in New York as completely as though he had dissolved into the very air. Among those who knew him the affair was a nine days' wonder, but on the tenth day it was forgotten, perhaps eclipsed by some new and greater enigma.

Only Barlow Garth, Dr. Winwood's colored assistant, knew where he had gone, and Barlow had gone with him. With him also had gone Coralie Winwood, the doctor's beautiful wife, although even she was unacquainted with the actual facts. As the train sped up into the wild stretches of woodland which carpet the slopes of the Adirondack Mountains, she sat by her drawing room window and crooned a rather weird love song, or rather it faintly resembled a love song, for it was like nothing of Earth. Sitting there by the window, bathed in sunlight, her lovely hair gleaming and shimmering about her shoulders like a golden flood, she was a thing of marvelous beauty. Her mouth was exquisitely fashioned, rather wistful and demure. The contour of her nose was flawless. Her eyes were violet-blue. They gleamed in the sunlight like gorgeous jewels, but their depths suggested darkness, black pools of brooding mystery. She smiled constantly for no apparent reason, and once she laughed aloud, a musical little laugh which made one think of the tinkling music of a tiny waterfall.

Dr. Winwood sat opposite his wife. He feasted his eyes upon her as though he were starving. He seemed to seek to slake his thirst for her in the dark flood of her eyes. When he spoke there was a gentleness in his voice that was almost a caress. He talked to her as though she were a mere child, and yet for the most part when he spoke to her he seemed to be addressing Barlow Garth, who stood constantly ready for commands, as faithful as the head eunuch in a sultan's palace. Yet though Barlow Garth stood in the manner of a servant, he was far from a servitor in the eyes of the doctor. For Barlow Garth was Dr. Winwood's greatest friend, despite their difference in color. He had assisted the doctor for years in all his experiments. In New York it used to be facetiously said that the black man was really the white man's shadow and not a separate personage at all. Barlow Garth heard the rumor and smiled his inimitable smile, but he did not seem ill-pleased.

If he had cared to be garrulous, he could have told an amazing story which would have sounded almost incredible, for the happenings of the past week had opened up an entirely new path in science. Barlow Garth had written exhaustive accounts of their experiment. He had done so at

the doctor's request. Perhaps some day he will publish a technical treatise on the matter, but not until many seasons have passed and memory has rather dulled until it fails to cut.

Down in New York six days before, Coralie Winwood had died, not from any lingering or devastating illness, but merely as the result of a severe heart attack. Although Dr. Winwood and Barlow Garth were both with her at the end, neither broke down nor showed their grief in the slightest. There was no time. They were scientists — cold, calculating scientists. They worked over the lifeless body like tireless steel machines. They were summoning all their skill for one supreme experiment. For months they had been practising their theories on dead dogs and cats. Now they were trying them on Coralie Winwood. It was not a shocking experiment, nor was there anything even slightly revolting about it. They were simply trying to bring Coralie Winwood back to life by the use of adrenalin, the most powerful stimulant known, the only drug that is sufficiently strong to give the tremendous shock to the heart which is necessary to restore life. Dr. Winwood was not the first to experiment with adrenalin, nor was he the first to prove its remarkable restorative propensities. Several other scientists had preceded him. He was merely one of the developers.

Fifteen minutes after Coralie had died she was restored to life, but rationality did not return to her, for it is a proven fact that a person's brain never functions again naturally after he has been actually dead for more than seven minutes. Thus, while Coralie was apparently alive and well again, as beautiful and warm as ever, she was in reality just a living corpse, not even aware that she was alive. Dr. Winwood could not bear to have anyone see her thus so he had taken her away to Lost Lake, his summer home, hidden in the heart of the Adirondacks.

DR. WINWOOD was a spiritualist. He believed there was a possible way for him to get into touch with the spirit of Coralie. If he could do so, he reasoned, he would then be possessed of both the physical and spiritual bodies of the girl whom he had loved more than anything else in the world. True, body and soul would be separated, but in any event he would be happy if he possessed them both. If his friends had known the workings of his mind, they would have thought him mad. But luckily nobody knew except Barlow Garth, and Barlow believed in his master utterly. Together they had performed many apparently impossible experiments. Neither of them admitted a thing impossible until it was proved so. And since there is always opportunity for further research, the only thing they admitted impossible was impossibility itself.

Although Coralie had lost her real personality, the wraithlike personality which she had assumed was distinctly alluring. She fascinated by her eery quaintness. She never seemed to truly know either Dr. Winwood or Barlow Garth. She ate the food they set before her, sat with them in the evenings before the open fire, and frequently went on rambles with them into the woodland. Yet never did she show by the faintest sign that she knew them. She would have gone away peacefully with anybody. To her, in her present condition, all people were the same. But what that sameness was is open to speculation.

When she was rambling about the forest trails or along the winding mountain paths she was like a dream awakened. Her usually pale face flushed with desire. Her eyes shone with an intense fire. As she walked

through the woods, the flowers seemed to bend toward her. Perhaps it was only imagination. Nevertheless it seemed a reality. But certain it is that the little wild things of the forest never fled when she approached. Rabbits, squirrels, deer—none showed the slightest fear of her. They seemed to sense that she was a beautiful wild thing like themselves. And always on her wanderings she sang songs as alluring as those of the Sirens. The very woods seemed hushed to listen. Even the birds were silent till the music of her voice had ceased. It was this singing that surprized Dr. Winwood more than anything else. Where had she learned such songs of magical loveliness? If she had no personality whatsoever, how did she remember the songs? Had she gone back into the ages and assumed one of the far distant personalities which had been hers in a former existence? Although Dr. Winwood did not exactly believe in reincarnation, the subject interested him. Coralie seemed possessed of a strange, split-off personality. Only songs and woodland grandeur aroused any glow in her. All else she viewed as from a dream. She was undoubtedly mad, but in a calmly beautiful way. She was never loud or violent, but always gentle as a lovely child. She was like a gorgeous flower growing in a field of gold.

Night after night Dr. Winwood tried to commune with the spirit of Coralie. He went out into the darkness of the mountains, and there he would sit for hours, his eyes closed, trying by the very force of his will to get into touch with her spirit. About him the darkness of the night hung in folds like a velvet canopy. Thousands of sounds echoed faintly to his ears, all in a hushed, subdued tone. Magic could have run rampant in those forests without seeming out of place. But never did Dr. Winwood accomplish his purpose. Night after night he sat on the rocks of a great plateau until the rose-pink tints of dawn commenced to glow in the east. Then he would wearily rise to his feet and walk slowly back to the house, looking terribly haggard and careworn. His only accomplishment was failure. But he did not give up hope. He believed in his theory.

One day he heard of an old Indian woman who lived down the lake about three miles. She was said to be a hundred and ten years old, yet so keen was her sight that she could see beyond the veil of reality. At once the doctor sent Barlow Garth in search of the woman, and at length she came to him. She was picturesque to an extreme. She wore a soft leather skirt and a waist of blue wool. Strung about her neck were dozens of fantastic ropes of beads, which she constantly fingered as though drawing inspiration or solace from them. Her hands were so bronzed by the sun they were almost black, but they were well-shaped and graceful. Her long slender fingers were never still for a moment. They seemed ever bent on some obscure quest.

The face of the old woman was like a mask. Even when she spoke in a low quaint voice the muscles of her face did not appear to move. She seemed petrified by age, almost a mummy. Her little gimletlike eyes peeped sharply forth from her gray-brown face. She smiled craftily after she had conversed long with the doctor and assured him that she could commune with spirits at will.

"The proper time," she declared softly, "is when the moon is at the full."

That very evening she went with the doctor and Barlow Garth into the woods. She faced the east and muttered some strangely guttural words. Then from her bag she took an odd array of nicknacks, a goat's hoof, some tundra moss, a bit of salt and a polished piece of ivory nut. With

these she proceeded to light a fire. It was slow work but eventually a tiny blue flame flared up in the darkness of the night. Immediately she commenced to dance a weird, wild dance. Despite her age she capered about the fire like a sprightly elf, shouting and screaming and shrieking for the spirit of Coralie to come to her. It was an uncanny sight. The pitch of her voice was frightful. It seemed to rasp on raw nerves.

Dr. Winwood shuddered. He knew at last that the old woman was a charlatan, that she possessed no spiritual power whatever. Her fame, such as it was, rested solely on her power to hypnotize and awe her audience. He rose to his feet and rushed blindly off into the cool blackness of the forest trails. He wanted to be alone, to get away from those awful sounds. His head was bursting. And he was unutterably sad and lonely. The exhibition which he had just viewed seemed like a sacrilege. He knew that the spirit of Coralie could never be influenced by such an extreme display of discord. All through the night he roamed through the forest. Often he fell, and the cool moist breast of the earth seemed to refresh him. Once he lay for almost an hour at full length, as though stunned, yet his faculties were doubly clear and calmness came to him in the soft fragrant lush of the dew.

When he returned to the house the sun had been up for hours. Coralie sat on the porch steps softly singing a plaintive melody. Near by Barlow Garth reclined in a hammock, gazing into space as though even in his moment of relaxation his scientific mind refused to let him rest.

As Dr. Winwood entered the house he motioned to Barlow to follow him. Not till they had reached his study did the doctor speak, then he said, "All last night I wandered through the forest, endeavoring to solve my problem. Never before did my mind work so keenly. The cool air on my face seemed to awaken every ounce of energy in me. In the silence of the forest a simple solution came to me. I marvel I did not think of it before. All along I have been trying to induce the spirit of Coralie to come to me. I failed. But there is nothing to prevent my spirit from temporarily going to hers."

Barlow Garth leaned forward in his chair. "What do you mean?" he cried.

"Merely that death is a door," was the reply, "and I intend to pass through it for a few minutes only. To many, death appears to be a black flood of mystery. They fear it because they do not understand it. But to me death holds no fear. It is a natural thing. I think of it merely as an adventure, not necessarily a permanent one. Tonight I intend to die. I will take a certain drug that will stop my heart. Exactly five minutes later you will bring me back to life again. That will give me five minutes to remain with Coralie, and as time does not exist in the spiritual world, the period will be as long there as we choose to make it. That gives you a leeway of two minutes."

Barlow Garth was amazed, but he offered no objection to the suggestion. He knew it would be useless to raise any obstacles. In any event he did not desire to do so. He was the perfect servant. He was the perfect friend as well. One could not ask more.

So in the early evening as the mist blanket of night was spreading down over the countryside, the doctor and Barlow went to the study. They took the physical Coralie with them and arranged a comfortable chair for her in front of the cheerful hearth. In the grate an immense pine log crackled merrily, and Coralie laughed back at it with all the abandon of a

simple child. She held out her white fingers to the blaze. And when the warmth came to them she was glad. She never tired of gazing into the fire, and usually she crooned a bit of a song as she stared.

Dr. Winwood took a small wine-glass from the table and slowly drank its contents. Then he lay down on the couch and folded his arms peacefully across his breast as though he were about to sleep. In a few minutes he was dead. Without a tremor he had passed into the spirit world. With the aid of a stethoscope Barlow Garth assured himself that death had indeed come. Then he took up his watch and stood over the rigid form, counting the minutes. It was an awesome adventure. There was no sound in the room save the occasional crackling of the embers and the soft dreamy singing of Coralie.

One, two, three, the minutes dragged past. To Barlow Garth each seemed an age. As the fourth minute came he felt as though his nerves were being drawn taut like rubber bands. He longed for something to happen to break the dreadful spell. Even as the wish came to him, there appeared a bright glow in the room behind him as though someone had lighted a great torch. As he turned he beheld Coralie enveloped in flames. Jumping forward, he seized a great rug and wrapped it about her. He worked as quickly as though he had the energy of a dozen men. Her dress had been of a flimsy net material, and almost immediately after it had brushed against the burning log she was a mass of flames. As Barlow fought to extinguish the fire, she moaned softly, but she did not scream. Her eyes were closed and she seemed to be losing consciousness, if such a term can be used in speaking of a girl who was scarcely ever conscious of anything.

Barlow Garth burned his hands till the raw flesh showed before the last spark was out. But quick as he had been, he had not been quick enough. Her body was terribly burned and her face was scarred and blackened almost beyond recognition. The marvelous beauty of Coralie was gone forever. She lay as rigid before him as Dr. Winwood. Barlow Garth gazed on her in horror for a moment, then he slowly placed the stethoscope to her breast. Her heart had ceased to beat. When he was sure that life was really extinct he rose to his feet. He seized his watch. Dr. Winwood had been dead for fifteen minutes. The fatal seventh minute had come and gone.

Barlow Garth recoiled from the watch in horror. What should he do? He gazed at the gruesome thing which had once been the gorgeous Coralie. To rekindle life in her would be to subject her to untold suffering while the wounds were healing. Sadly he shook his head. Then he turned to Dr. Winwood. If he brought the doctor back to life again it would be but to make of him a living corpse. The mind would be gone. He leaned down and looked into his beloved master's face. The lips were smiling and there was an expression of calmer repose about the eyes than there had been for months. Barlow Garth bowed his head in thankfulness as he realized that Dr. Winwood had found his beloved Coralie at last.

Here Are the Closing Chapters of

FETTERED

By GREYE LA SPINA

The Story So Far

EWAN GILLESPIE and his twin sister Bessie go to the woods to spend the summer. Dr. Dale Armitage warns them that they must never invite his wife, Gretel Armitage, into their cabin, under pain of dire consequences so fearful that they would not believe him should he explain what those consequences were. He leaves with Bessie the key to the lodge where he keeps his wife imprisoned behind heavy bars, while he goes to the funeral of a child who has died of pernicious anemia.

Ewan, fearing the doctor's lodge may be struck by lightning, rescues Gretel in a roaring thunderstorm and brings her to his cabin. Bessie surprises Gretel in the dead of night, her lips pressed against Ewan's throat, and the next day Ewan is faint and white, and complains of a pain in his throat from what he thinks is a spider-bite. Dr. Armitage tells Bessie that Gretel is a human vampire, who has brought about the death of a seven-year-old child, and that she will attack Ewan again if she gets the opportunity.

Gretel sweeps into the cabin in a roaring wind at dead of night and attacks Bessie, but the doctor comes on the scene in the nick of time to save the girl. Gretel threatens that she will kill herself and conceal her body so that the doctor can not find it, in which case she would be unfettered to roam at night and attack whomsoever she wishes, and rushes out of the cabin into the woods. Dr. Armitage explains to Bessie and Ewan how Gretel had become a vampire after her father's death in Munich, and how he had married her to watch over her and keep her from making victims of those around her; but Ewan refuses to listen to the story, and goes into his own room, leaving Bessie and the doctor together.

CHAPTER 14

THE RETURN OF THE UNDEAD

AS IF conjured by the mention of himself, Ewan opened his door wide and stood there for a moment looking out upon the two. A secret smile of superiority curled his lips. He was carrying a knapsack which bulged as if it were heavily stuffed.

"It's 10 o'clock," said he abruptly. "I can't afford to waste this glorious summer morning, listening to ghost stories. I'm on my way upstream a bit, Bessie. I may not be back for lunch, but I've taken some chocolate, so I shan't starve. You coming my way?" he added suddenly, pointedly addressing the doctor.

Dale rose with a slight contraction of his forehead.

"I still have something to talk over with your sister, Gillespie," said he with too much seriousness for Ewan to take offense. "And then I must try to find Gretel, dead or alive."

Ewan hesitated, then burst out with obvious reluctance:

"She isn't dead, Armitage. I've seen her. I know her plans and I approve them. She would be foolish indeed to submit herself to you, to be put under lock and key like a dangerous lunatic. She is alive and well, and," he finished hastily as the doctor sprang to his feet and confronted him with agitation, "and you won't find her."

"You have seen her? When? Where? Thank God she still lives! That means there is hope for you, yet!"

Ewan stepped back a few paces toward the outer door of the cabin, his eyes on the doctor.

"I don't suppose it will do any harm to tell you," he argued as if with himself.

"Where did you see Gretel?" demanded the doctor sternly. "Answer at once!"

"Put it that way, and see what you'll get," retorted the artist truculently.

"Ewan—please!"

Ewan's head jerked angrily.

"Well, if I must, Bessie—a few minutes ago, I saw her. She came to my window and I climbed out, and

we talked. She has no intention of putting herself back into your hands, Armitage. In my opinion she would be quite unjustified in doing so, after the insane way you've been acting and talking."

"Ewan!"

"Well, Bessie, if you'd listen to me, you'd send this man packing. That poor girl has been bulldozed by him for a long time, but she has rebelled at last. I advised her to go to a—to a kind of cave I found in the woods the other day. I do not advise you, Armitage, to attempt finding that cave, for your wife has my pistol, which I gave her at her own request to defend herself in case of need, and I have a strong feeling that she will shoot anybody who intrudes upon her to deprive her of her freedom," Ewan declared.

"He has given her the means of carrying out her threat!" said the doctor to Bessie. "I must find her if I can, before it is too late. . . . Perhaps I can persuade her to hark to the dictates of a conscience that I can not believe is entirely dead within her. Keep the cabin door closed, Bessie. And put that branch of wild rose over the lintel. You must understand very clearly by now what her entrance here would mean to you."

Seeing that the doctor was about to leave, Ewan turned and went briskly across the clearing. The other two watched him out of sight.

"Couldn't you have given that dead professor peace, Dale? Wouldn't that have healed Gretel?" asked Bessie, then.

"She refused me access to her father's tomb. And as I saw her inclined more and more to fall within that circle of evil influence, I brought her here, or she would have been drained by her Master of the last drop of blood. But some day I must return to Munich and somehow manage to gain access to the professor's tomb, and—do that which will give him peace."

Bessie shuddered.

"It is horrible, Dale."

"Yes, brown Bessie, it is horrible. But now I must look for Gretel or she will manage to lure your brother to his doom. Pray that he may return to you in safety tonight," he added darkly.

"Must I remain alone, Dale?"

"I shall come back at nightfall and stay until dawn," the doctor reassured her comfortingly. "I can not risk your being alone here, with Gretel unleashed."

EVEN with that promise to depend upon, Bessie did not spend a very happy day. She remained within doors, barring the way that might otherwise give entrée to Gretel. When afternoon shadows began to stretch long lines across the clearing, she watched more and more anxiously for her brother. Just before dark he came out of the wood. Without paying any attention to her, he walked purposefully into the inner room and began tearing down the wild rose sprays from window and door.

"Ewan, what are you doing?" his sister called in sharp anxiety.

"I'm not going to have these ridiculous things here, Bessie," said he resentfully. "Lot of superstitious rubbish that fellow's been stuffing you with. What earthly good are these dried things, I ask you? Use your head, sis. He can't put it over on me, and if you weren't so credulous, you'd see how silly his story is, too. Tonight you will find that nothing extraordinary will happen, except that poor Gretel will have a chance for a good night's sleep in peace and safety."

"Gretel? Not *here*?" ejaculated the girl, her face pallid, her eyes staring at him wildly.

"Here," he responded tersely. "Do you suppose I'd let her spend the

night out in the woods? I'll sleep out here in a bunk, and she shall have my room. Tomorrow I'll take her down to Amity Dam, and then——" but his look grew slyly secretive.

"And then——?" prompted Bessie, apprehensively.

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you, Bessie? So you could notify that fellow? Well, sis, you're not going to find out. What have you got for supper? I left Gretel my flashlight, so that she could find her way through the woods, and she'll be hungry."

"*Hungry?*" gasped Bessie, shrinking. "Ewan, I can't have that girl in here. I just *can't.*"

"Don't be a goose, sis. And when she comes, be decent to her. She's had a time with that fellow, Bessie, and you could see with half an eye that he's off his bat, only you're so hypnotized by his big black eyes and his Vandyke beard," disgustedly, "that you really think this silly rot he's stuffed you with is true."

Ewan finished tearing down the wild rose sprays, and was opening the cabin door to put them out when Bessie stopped him.

"Leave them on the floor in the corner, Ewan," she said, as casually as she could. "I'll put them out later. Or I could use them for light kindling."

Ewan dropped them indifferently.

"As long as they're not draped about the house, I don't care," he said.

In a few minutes Ewan was eating hungrily, his back to the door, for Bessie had cunningly placed his chair so that he could not look from the window across the clearing.

"Now I'll put these things out," said she aloud, and picked up the dried branches.

"That's the girl," applauded her brother.

Bessie hastily tiptoed to the small room, and with trembling fingers hung what branches she could about the window and over the lintel of the inner door. Then she slipped out of the cabin, one remaining spray of withered wild rose still in her shaking hands.

Out of the forest depths twinkled the ray of an electric flash. Now and then, as the holder advanced, it turned upon his face, as if to notify and reassure any watcher in the cabin.

"Dale! It is you! Thank God!"

Bessie almost fell into the doctor's astonished arms, as he came out into the clearing.

"What has happened?"

She told him quickly, in broken phrases.

"He has been with her today, and she is now preparing for her entry tonight," declared the doctor tensely. "It is her influence that made him tear down the rose sprays. Bessie, she must not be allowed to enter! It might mean your brother's death—or yours, brown girl."

Bessie held out the withered spray of wild rose.

"I can put this over the cabin door. I've put the others back into Ewan's room, but he'll be furious when he sees them. If he takes them down, I won't remain in the cabin. I'd rather drown myself than face Gretel again," she said passionately.

The doctor cut off the light from his electric flash.

"I'll watch here for Gretel. I will intercept her. There is one last resort for tonight—until I can provide myself with the right articles to put a stop to her wickedness. I pray God I may not have to use that last resort, though, for the thought of it sickens me."

"What is that, Dale?"

He stared at her in the dusk.

"If I am unable to persuade her in any other way, I shall let her have her will of me," he said.

"Dale! Dale! Not that! I refuse to be saved by such a sacrifice. But —what if Ewan pulls down the sprays?"

The doctor thought a moment. He drew a small case of phials from his pocket, turning the flash upon it. He selected a bottle, tipped a couple of tablets onto his palm and gave them to the girl.

"Put these into his food," he ordered. "He'll probably go into a doze, and he shouldn't wake until morning. Before he gets fully asleep, get him into his room and shut him in with the wild rose sprays."

Urged by the doctor's gentle hand at her elbow, Bessie went back to the cabin with the tablets.

"Go with God, my brown maid," he whispered, and at the door his lips brushed her cheek. "I shall watch over you tonight, my dear one."

Bessie closed the door loudly. Ewan turned at the sound.

"Glad you got rid of that rubbish, sis," said he. "Tea ready? I'll pour myself a cupful."

Almost in a panic, she pulled the cup from his hand.

"Sit down, Ewan, do. I'll pour it for you. You're—you're tired, being out in the woods all day."

Her back turned, she slipped the tablets into the steaming amber beverage and then watched them impatiently as they dissolved with exasperating slowness. When the last drop in the cup had gone down Ewan's throat she felt more relaxed, especially as she noticed in a few minutes that his eyelids were dropping drowsily.

"I'll stay out here, sis. Fix up my room for Gretel, will you?" he murmured heavily.

Bessie guided his feet into his own room, glad that he was so sleepy by now that he did not realize where he was going. Thankfulness in her heart, she saw him slip down and begin breathing heavily. She saw to it that the burlap was pulled well across the window, and that the rose sprays were in place about it, as well as secure over the lintel. Then she shut the door with the feeling that he, at least, was safe for the time being.

She had not yet barred the outer door, nor had she had time, with Ewan watching her, to put that other rose spray over the lintel. Now she turned to take this last precaution. And as she turned, she heard a soft rustling at the door, such as a serpent makes among dead autumn leaves, and the latch lifted with menacing slowness that froze her with alarm where she stood.

The door opened. Bessie retreated against the inner door, her heart beating painfully against her side. The door swung wide. There was the whisking of garments, and Gretel glided in, pushed the door to, and turned to Bessie, her sharp white teeth glistening in the lamplight.

"How disappointed you must have felt, sweetheart, that we were interrupted last night! Was it for that you left the latch up for me? Well, I am here, Bessie. And tonight there shall be no interruptions. I left Dale far out in the woods," she laughed shrilly. "I led him a merry chase. He is upstream now, running about with his electric flashlight and calling me, and threatening me with dire things if I don't answer!"

She threw back her head, until the flaxen locks tumbled about her shoulders, so white and smooth in the friendly light of the kerosene lamp. She laughed softly, triumphantly, cunningly. Then, her red tongue lapping delicately at her vivid lips, she turned the full, hypnotic gaze of her luridly blazing eyes upon the shrinking girl, with such confidence in her power to bend her to her will that Bessie quaked inwardly, although she met the look bravely,

sheer desperation bracing her into outward composure.

"You thought Dale would be watching over you, didn't you, Bessie, my dear?" softly asked the doctor's wife, her shoulders shaking with malicious merriment. "Well, I saw to it that he'd be far enough away tonight. There'll be plenty of time for me—for *us*, Bessie—before he comes. As for your brother, when I'm ready for him I'll call him, but just now I'm going to punish Dale through you.

"I shall take all you have to give me tonight. I'm through with being modest in my demands," she leered. "I'm thirsty, Bessie——. And when you're mine, you shall bring Dale to me, yourself. Ah, that will be a sweet revenge! And you shall be as I am now," and she lifted one hand to push aside the tumbling flaxen locks from her left temple. "Today I put a bullet through my head with your brother's revolver. That has freed me forever from Dale's idiotic assumption of authority. That is, unless he finds my body, and I've taken precious good care that he shan't," she added, viciously.

Bessie's cold lips stammered:

"But you're—not—*dead?*"

Gretel laughed shrilly.

"Poor Bessie! You can't understand it, can you? Come to me and judge for yourself," she invited. "Feel the chill of my hand—and the death-sweat on my brow—and put your finger, if you will, into this bullet wound——"

Horror overcame Bessie.

"Dale! Help! Dale!" she found herself screaming wildly.

Scornful amusement played over Gretel's pallid, waxen face.

"He can not come, Bessie. Not now. He is too far away. And when he comes, you will be very white, Bessie, and I shall be rosy-red with color from the warm blood you are going to give me now." She laughed again.

Bessie's wide eyes stared at the doctor's wife fixedly, incredulously. She was pressing her cold hands against her trembling mouth. She was telling herself that she must not —*must not*—waken Ewan.

"But how silly we are, talking away precious, delicious moments," whispered Gretel, advancing sinuously, the red lights in her eyes blazing with hypnotic power upon Bessie, who shrank back in spite of herself against that inner door.

"You are going to—to kill me—tonight?" she managed to gasp through dry, working lips.

Gretel stopped short for a moment. Sly cunning wrote her thoughts across her cold face.

"No, sweetheart, after all I won't —not tonight. Don't be afraid. I shall only take enough to warm me a little and to assuage my thirst—you are so full of rich, red blood, Bessie, that it does my heart good to look at you," she enthused mockingly. "Come to me, Bessie. *Come!* You don't want to hear me call your brother?" she insinuated, craftily, and smiled at the quick start that the other girl gave at her words.

"Oh no—not Ewan!"

"Then come to me of your own free will," coaxed Gretel. "It won't hurt, I promise. Only for a tiny moment. You can not imagine how delicious it is to feel my lips against your throat, brown girl—once my sharp teeth have met in your tender flesh. There is even an ecstasy in being absorbed into another's being, as I draw your life out through your pierced vein. I know—*I know!* It will be—*wonderful*—I promise you.

"Come! I shall kiss you hotly, ardently, as no lover has ever kissed you, sweetheart. Come to me! *Of your own free will!*"

As she spoke, Gretel came closer, sliding silently, sinuously, until her

hands touched Bessie's, drawing the other girl's fingers down from the terror-glazed eyes. The icy thrill of those terrible fingers froze Bessie, so that she stood, unable to move.

"I told you I would return to you in anger, but I hadn't the heart, sweet," murmured the doctor's wife sibilantly. "You are so rosy and round, Bessie, that I long to have you offer yourself instead of being obliged to. Be still, foolish girl! I am stronger than you. It is futile to struggle against the Undead. And do not shrink.

"In a moment I shall kiss you, and then you will thrill as you never dreamed you could. My poor pale cheeks will grow pink with your warm blood, Bessie, and I shall love you because of the life you are giving me. And I shall come to you again soon—very soon—so that you can yield me the last drop in your veins, and then—and then—I'll show you how to win Dale to us, Bessie!"

The hateful, sinuous arms held Bessie tight, clipped her against the algid chill of Gretel's bosom. The red lips drew back against the gums, and the sharp, glistening white teeth were disclosed.

"Do not struggle so, Bessie! Tip your head back—so. Ah!"

Bessie felt herself swooning.

"This time," was her last conscious thought, "I am lost indeed!"

CHAPTER 15

GRETEL DRIVES A BARGAIN

The cabin door flew open. Into the room, like an avenging fury, strode Dale Armitage, dark eyes flashing, face working with anxiety.

"Put that girl down!" he shouted, as he crossed the threshold and sprang toward the two women.

He put his arms across Gretel's shoulders, loosening her hold and jerking her brutally away from the fainting girl, who staggered back against Ewan's door.

Gretel's face altered subtly from its alluring sweetness into that semblance of a thwarted fiend that was so horrible. She twisted from her husband's grasp and again flung herself upon Bessie, who had no time even to throw her hands before her throat in self-protection.

"I *shall* have her!" screamed Gretel shrilly. "She is *mine*, I tell you."

Again the doctor pulled her away, this time jerking her about until he stood between the two women; the trembling Bessie, and the palpitating, furious Undead with gnashing teeth.

"She is not yours," he retorted sternly. "And you shall never have her. Not while I live to prevent it."

"You think because you hold me here that you have won the game," replied his wife furiously. "Today I put a bullet through my head. See?" and she pulled from him, shaking her head until the wound could be plainly observed in her left temple.

"If I keep you here until daylight, Gretel," said the doctor, with repugnance, "you can not escape me. Your body will be under my control, for you will have no chance to hide it away before sunrise. And then I shall do to it what must be done," said he, sternly.

In Gretel's drooping mien, her slyly veiled eyes, cunning concealed itself none too well. She leaned languorously toward him.

"Dale—if it is you who holds me—my only love! Keep me close to your side all night, my dear, my dearest! And then tomorrow—free me!"

The doctor's grasp relaxed, ever so slightly. In that unguarded moment she pulled away from him and stood swaying in the open doorway.

"Don't make one step toward me, Dale. One movement, and I shall be gone, and you can not follow my flight or find where I shall hide my

body before day breaks. Ahriman will sweep me away on the winds, as he has done before!"

Dale groaned: "Fool that I am!"

Softly, alluringly, Gretel laughed. With such sweetness did she hold out her white arms to him that Bessie, leaning on the table, felt that magnetic undercurrent of power thrilling in her own veins and half rose, still under the hypnotism of Gretel's influence. The doctor's wife saw this and flung back her flaxen head, laughing again that shrilly triumphant laughter that Bessie dreaded, so did it draw upon her tense nerves, titillating them beyond endurance.

"Something of a fool you are, and always have been, Dale," agreed the Undead scornfully. "And I was stupid enough to love you! Dale, I make a bargain with you. Ewan is mine; I have but to call him and he will tear down the fragile barriers you have placed between us, and come to me, to offer me the remaining drops of his blood. As for Bessie—look at her—and see if she is not already mine! Mine to call, because she has yielded in spirit to my stronger will not once, but twice."

The doctor looked and groaned again, for Bessie's soft hazel eyes had grown hard and staring, fixed upon Gretel's redly glowing orbs. Even as he watched, the girl began to move uncertainly toward the outer door where Gretel beckoned. For a moment there was tense silence; then came the sound of crackling, dried branches. The door of the inner room opened and from it were thrust the withered rose sprays Bessie had placed there to protect her brother. Ewan, somehow sensing the undercurrents of tense emotion, had wakened, and in another minute would emerge, to fall also under the terrible spell of the Undead . . . .

Through the dulling senses of Bessie there penetrated the realization of her brother's imminent danger. Suddenly, as if in a panic, she ran straight past the horrified physician and into the outstretched arms of the smiling Gretel, who received the fainting body and lifted it tightly clutched against her breast.

"Not Ewan!" panted Bessie incoherently. "Take me—instead!"

Dale Armitage lifted both hands in resignation. He took one look toward the other room, in the doorway of which Ewan now stood like a man entranced, waiting to be called by that terrible Undead to which he had become enslaved. He gave one yearning look at the body of the girl he loved, lying laxly against Gretel's breast. Then——

"Well, do you accept the bargain?" crisply demanded his wife. "I give you both these, Dale, on one condition."

"And that——?" he whispered hoarsely, hopelessly.

"Sweet Bessie has given herself to me of her own will," proceeded Gretel calmly. "Her brother only awaits my call, to offer me what remains of his blood. And—oh, Ahriman, how I thirst!"

As if she could no longer restrain herself, she arched her neck and plunged her face downward in a long curve upon Bessie's throat.

The doctor, with an incoherent exclamation, sprang frantically forward. He pushed up that flaxen head until the blazing, hell-blasting eyes met his own desperate ones. He tugged impotently at the arms that clutched Bessie's body.

"Let her go! She is an innocent girl. I—I give in, Gretel!" he groaned in agony of spirit.

His wife let the other girl's body drop callously to the floor, as she read in Dale's eyes his surrender.

"Oh, Dale, my love! At last!" she breathed. "Ahriman did not lie to me! Through devious ways I have sought your love, Dale. I have sold my soul to gain you. And

now——? You will give yourself to me freely? I may slake my thirst from your veins, until you leave your fainting body to become my eternal companion? Ahriman! Ahriman!" she shrilled in an abandonment of wild, eery triumph, waving her arms in the air as she conjured.

The rising of an icy wind came suddenly upon the little group with a tearing blast of piercing cold. Gretel pulled at the doctor's arm. He jerked away from her, as if half entranced but desperately resisting. Stiffly as an automaton, he backed away from her, picking up the limp form of Bessie and lifting it in his arms. She stared at him, suspicion darkening her waxen face.

"I must first say good-bye to Bessie," said the doctor sharply.

Gretel shrugged her shoulders carelessly.

"Do not be too long about it," she warned ominously. "My patience has been tried severely, Dale."

Bessie flung up her arms and caught the doctor about the neck, as he laid her on the cot in the living room.

"Dale, don't go! Rather let it be me!" she implored.

He shook his head emphatically.

"This is my responsibility, brown girl. Tomorrow you will leave this accursed spot. If God gives me strength, I shall live tomorrow, for I do not believe she can drain all my life from me tonight," said he significantly. "Later you will return to the lodge, if you have the courage, and you will see that our bodies——"

"Oh, Dale, Dale!" she broke into soft, bitter weeping.

"——that our bodies," he went on inexorably, "are cremated on a pyre of mountain ash."

"I could not! I could not!"

"What I ask you, Bessie, is love's greatest sacrifice," he told her solemnly. "Unless you do this, I must go on into eternity—Undead—accursed."

"I promise!" she choked.

"God bless you, dear."

His cheek touched hers. Vaguely she sensed that he dared not kiss her; he had dedicated himself to Evil and would not contaminate her purity. Then he was gone. His footsteps died away in the quiet night.

The icy blast that had risen at Gretel's conjurations now began to scream and whistle about the little cabin. It tore at the door Dale had closed behind him as he went to make his sublime sacrifice.

And in his doorway Ewan stood with suddenly alert eyes, listening to his sister sobbing as if her heart would break. Across his face passing thoughts sent drifting expressions that clearly portrayed his bewilderment of mind and spirit.

Was he mad? Was Bessie mad? Or were those others——?

One dominant thought, one urging purpose, arose in his mind. He and Bessie must leave that unholy place, at the earliest opportunity.

CHAPTER 16

THE FUNERAL PYRE

EARLY afternoon of the following day.

Bessie had finished packing up her own and her brother's belongings, under Ewan's pressing orders.

"We're going down to Amity Dam this afternoon," he had said to her, finality in voice and mien. "There's too much of the outré about this whole situation. The pair of them are crazy as loons. Ought to be put away, both of them, for the safety of sane folk," he had added with what the girl recognized as resentment at the way he had been obliged to alter his set opinion of Gretel Armitage.

"Can't we wait a little longer?" the girl pleaded, longing with all her heart to get out of her brother's

sight and hunt at the lodge for Dale.

"Sorry, Bessie, but it isn't a case now of what you want to do. That fellow has gotten you half scared to death with his ghastly yarns. As for me, I'm as nervous and shaky as the very dickens, and I don't intend to put in the rest of the summer in such shape. No, sis, we don't stay here. We're going, before night," he finished, with such an expression on his face that Bessie knew that he was now realizing acutely that there was something uncanny about the strange experiences that had befallen them both, little as he cared to acknowledge it.

In silence she had begun packing. The cabin was soon denuded of cooking utensils, blankets, pillows, painting paraphernalia. Already the rooms wore an air of desolation that struck painfully at Bessie's spirit.

"After we've had a bite to eat, sis, we'll get these last things into the canoe," said Ewan briskly. "And before dusk we ought to be down at the village. Going with the stream, you know, makes the trip down quite nothing."

Mechanically Bessie began to prepare that last little meal, a cold one save for the tea, since almost everything but the necessary food had been packed away in the canoe.

"Jove, sis! Be careful there! You'll scald yourself!" came Ewan's warning cry, as the girl snatched up the teakettle, then set it hastily down again, so that the boiling water slopped steaming upon the hot surface of the stove.

Bessie was not listening. She had run to the cabin door and out, and was across the clearing like a deer, to meet the man who, with dragging steps, slowly advanced toward the cabin.

"Dale!"

He held her off, unsteady hands extended against her nearer approach. His dark eyes were pools of exhaustion in a pallid, bloodless face. His lips were white, tight-drawn against his teeth, showing the bloodless gums.

"No, Bessie. Not yet," said he, each word coming with the gasping emphasis that bespoke the struggle it cost him to speak with his waning strength. "Not yet—dear."

"Oh, my dear, you are alive! Thank God! Thank God!"

"Alive?" A laugh jerked from him that was like a cry.

"You are going with us, aren't you, Dale? If you aren't, then I shall stay," said the girl firmly.

"Go!"

"I can not," said her dry lips. "I can not leave you. My place is at your side."

A faint smile flickered over the doctor's chalky face.

"Then—take me—with you," he whispered, and stumbled toward the cabin. "I—have performed what I had to, upon her body, this morning. But—Bessie—never ask me of last night! It must be a closed book between us, unutterably terrible—unreadable."

Incredulous joy seized upon the girl, despite his words.

"But before I go—I must await—the healing—of this." His hand went to his neck in piteous gesture. "Because I gave myself of my own free will, I am not yet healed."

Ewan's voice sounded bruskly from the cabin.

"My neck's healed!" he cried out sharply. "Those little wounds have disappeared!"

Fixing the artist with his hollow eyes, the doctor said:

"That is because I have this day cut off her head and driven a stake through her heart!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Ewan, horror-stricken.

"And I made a funeral pyre—of mountain ash—and her body lies on

it, even now, surrounded by cleansing flames."

"Dale! And then you will be healed, also?" asked Bessie's anxious, eager voice.

Dale nodded affirmatively.

Ewan's eyes followed that movement of the doctor's hand to his neck; saw the two tiny punctures on his neck; the smeared dried blood which Dale had not yet stopped to cleanse from his skin, the remaining trace of Gretel's horrid feasting.

"You — you — were bitten—too!" said Ewan, and he walked all at once to the doctor's side. "Then—what I heard last night—and saw—was not —my God, it was not a dream!"

He flung one arm about the fainting man, and supported him to the canoe, letting him slip down upon the bundles packed into the little craft.

"Forgive me, old man. I—I couldn't understand," he murmured.

Horror glazed his eyes.

"Let's get out of here," he said sharply. "Bessie, I'd rather wait to eat until we're downstream a bit. How about it, sis?"

"Ewan, you're beginning to understand!" she agreed, gladly. "No, I'm not hungry. I—I just want to get away."

"Understand?" whispered her brother, his face chalky with the bizarre thoughts he dared not permit organization in his mind. "Bessie, I don't *want* to understand! I only know that I want to leave this place just as quickly as I can."

"And you realize that Dale——?"

"Poor chap! Jove, Bessie, let's get busy. I—I feel as if I couldn't breathe freely here," Ewan declared, setting his sister an example by emptying the hot water from the kettle, wrapping the kettle in newspapers, and grabbing up the plates that she had been setting out for that last lunch.

It did not seem ten minutes before the scurrying feet had made those last trips back and forth between cabin and canoe. Bessie got in, lifted the doctor's head upon her lap, and saw with lighter heart that he was breathing more easily. Ewan lifted his paddle, dipped it into the water, and pushed against the sandy bank to set the canoe afloat for the trip downstream.

Dale opened his eyes suddenly, staring about him as the branches overhead slipped backward when the stream took the canoe and drew it away from the shore.

"Stop!" he said feebly. "I can not go yet."

Apprehension held Bessie silent. He added:

"I put fire to the funeral pyre, but until—*everything*—is consumed, I dare not go."

"How shall we know?" the girl queried, nervously.

The doctor's hand, in that significant gesture, went to his throat.

"When the last trace of her—it—has been consumed in the cleansing flames, these wounds will disappear, Bessie, for her spell will be broken."

SLOWLY the canoe drifted downstream. As it slipped between the green banks, signs of that portent which all three awaited came to them through the summer air. Flying bits of charred wood carried upward by the powerful draft drifted about. The smell of burning wood—and something else more pungent—assailed their nostrils. As they drew nearer the lodge, the reason for this was clear.

In front of the building, where the woods had been cleared away, there had been built up a funeral pyre of dry wood, upon which undoubtedly the doctor had poured gasoline to saturation, for the flames were glowing with a red heat about the central part of the pile. As now and then the flames and the curling smoke blew aside, they could see on the summit

encircled by leaping fire, something—a dark something with a glint of gold—that would be—her hair.

As the trio stared, the center of the pile collapsed before their straining eyes, and that dark something crashed inward to the heart of the flames. The fire leaped higher, then died away into smoldering embers . . . .

"It is over now," declared the doctor.

He closed his eyes, a kind of grateful relaxation in the tired drooping of the lids, and a quivering sigh of relief shook his body weakly. As one hand moved across his neck, a faint smile came to his pale lips. It seemed to Bessie that they had taken on a warmer tinge; that his waxen pallor was altering subtly to a more lifelike and natural hue.

"All right to get away from here?" asked Ewan gruffly, paddle lifted to send the canoe swiftly on its way downstream.

Bessie's eyes were swimming with thankful tears. She dipped her handkerchief into the brook's running water; gently cleansed the doctor's neck, wiping away the crimson stains. Ewan, as well as she, saw that the punctures were gone.

"Everything is all right," responded the girl, her voice trembling with an influx of happiness as she realized what this meant to Dale and to her.

The artist dipped his paddle into the sparkling water, as if his drained energies had been renewed miraculously.

The little craft slipped swiftly downstream toward civilization, sanity, clean, everyday life.

The fetters had been broken, at last.

[THE END]

GRAVE CHAINS

***By* A. LESLIE**

You are dead!
Or so men say;
I only know that you have fled
By some uncharted way.

But there's a wall, a shadow-wall,
That I sense but can not see,
Chill as the breath of a cankered pall,
That shuts you back from me.

And at night when a wild white moon sweeps by
Through the ashen corridors,
And cloud-ghosts writhe in the tortured sky
'Neath the glare of the screaming stars—

I hear your fingers tap and quest
Beyond the unseen wall,
And pattering steps that can not rest,
And I thrill to an unheard call.

A Five-Minute Tale

The Phantom Express

By H. THOMPSON RICH

ONCE, twice, three times the station-clock's thin steel minute-hand had traced its monotonous circuit. Over in a corner of the big room several tired itinerants sat half-asleep. From behind the barred ticket window a telegraph instrument talked fitfully. Elsewhere silence, save when the main door swung narrowly to admit an occasional overcoated, sleeted figure—and a squall of zero air. The Transcontinental was late.

Boom! Out of the dark came a dull epic of sound. *Boom!* It spread through the air like fog. *Boom!* Twelve times, till the night was saturated with muffled reverberations.

Hardly had the last lifeless echo faded, when a series of piercing shrieks announced the long-awaited Transcontinental. A moment later she rolled into the shed, steaming and sheathed in ice.

Engineer Hadden stepped wearily from the cab and swung off up the platform, chafing his chilled hands together. The stationmaster ambled out to meet him, throwing shadowy circles from his swinging lantern.

"Open track ahead, Hadden. Orders to hit 'er up!"

Behind them the passengers were piling aboard. Hadden half turned.

"Dangerous business, hitting her up this sort of weather," he muttered, "but orders are orders!"

He climbed back into the cab. When the signal came, he opened the throttle. Swiftly the Transcontinental slid out of the shed.

Then he looked at his watch. It read 12:05.

"A straight stretch for eighty miles!" he exclaimed, and let her out.

The locomotive rocked and leapt ahead—now forty, now fifty, now sixty miles an hour.

"Mike!" he yelled, and the wash of air whipped the words back into the fireman's ear like pistol shots. "Mike, we make Mansford by 1."

"An hour?" screamed the latter. "*An hour?* Eighty miles? Man, yer dr-reaming!"

"Maybe I am," said Hadden grimly, giving her another notch.

ON INTO the night they rushed, faster and faster, till it was all O'Connell could do to keep that dancing devil of a steam-gage needle up to where it belonged. Stripped to his red flannel shirt, he stood in the lurid glow of the fire-box stoking like a madman, while the ground reeled and swayed beneath him and the sky hissed dizzily over his head.

Firm on the little cab seat sat the chief, gazing fixedly ahead. He was tired and cold, and he thought how comfortable his little home would be, at the end of the run. He pictured Mary, his wife, waiting for him at the door — then the steaming supper—then sleep.

He yawned. He nodded.

On and on they roared, up grades, down inclines, over trestles, leaving behind them a long unbroken ribbon of echoes.

Suddenly Hadden jumped and rubbed his eyes. Then he stiffened

and peered into the dark ahead—and saw a long, straight line of racing lights.

"Another express, not a mile away!"

"Mike! for the love of God, look!"

"Look where?"

O'Connell looked.

"I see nothin'!" he shouted back.

"You see what?"

"I see nothin'!"

"Then look again!"

O'Connell looked again.

"I see nothin', I say—nothin' at all!"

"Michael O'Connell," muttered the engineer, "you're a liar!"

They pulled into Mansford on the stroke of 1. Hadden watched the other express disappear into the dark ahead, and climbed angrily from his cab. He had been assured an open track. He would see what they meant by blocking the Transcontinental.

But the stationmaster knew of no train ahead.

"I tell you, your track is clear," he repeated, "open and clear to the end of the run!"

"You can tell me and be damned!" swore Hadden. "I tell you it's not!"

Suddenly he climbed back into his seat. It was 1:05.

"We'll make it by 2," he said, opening her up. "God, I'm tired!"

Soon they were roaring on into the dark again—and suddenly the other express loomed up ahead, a ghostly vanguard.

"Mike!" yelled Hadden; "for the last time, look ahead!"

O'Connell looked once more.

"I see nothin'—nothin'!" he exclaimed. "Ferget it!"

"All right. Shut up!" sighed the chief, and was silent.

Now they entered Cleft Forest Valley and went thundering down a steep incline, filling the precipitous places with their clamor. And all at once, following with haggard eye the phantom express, Hadden saw it dive over a dizzy trestle, saw it shudder—saw it leave the rails and hurtle down, down, into abysmal darkness and utter destruction.

Then, like a man suddenly roused from a trance, he awoke to the horror of the situation. In an instant he did a dozen things, and O'Connell clung desperately to a stanchion while the swaying locomotive steadied itself to a grinding, jolting stop—just twenty feet from the yawning brink of the bridgeless chasm.

"The trestle must have been swept away by the storm—we're right at the edge of the gulch—it's a miracle—the engineer is all that saved us," came from the breathless crowd that poured out of the cars and collected about the scene.

Later, when Hadden and O'Connell were brought before an investigating committee they had nothing to say, and took their reward in silence.

And there the matter rested.

SO OFTEN, in our search for bizarre and unusual stories to publish in WEIRD TALES, we come across a manuscript that has an excellent basic idea for a weird plot, but the writer does not know how to build the idea into a weird tale that will thrill the readers of this magazine. For instance, the editor recently received a very well-worded manuscript from an author whose stories appear in many good magazines; in this story a physician experiments with a lizard that grows new limbs to replace the limbs it has lost, and prepares a serum from its blood; he tries the serum on animals, and finds that it grows new limbs; so to try it out on a human being he drugs a girl and cuts off her arms and legs, but the girl dies from loss of blood, and the doctor goes insane from disappointment. That's all there is to the story. It might thrill someone who had never read WEIRD TALES, but the imaginative treatment that builds up a fascinating plot is entirely lacking. The story was returned to its author, for it did not have the WEIRD TALES touch. The theme of growing new limbs on a human being has been used before, and is not in itself a story; it needs to be worked out in an imaginative and bizarre plot, as Romeo Poole handled this theme for WEIRD TALES in *A Hand From the Deep;* then it makes a story to be remembered.

Mere weird material does not constitute a plot; and many a bizarre plot is spoiled by unimaginative treatment. You, the readers of WEIRD TALES, demand something more. You have long ago passed the stage where you hang with breathless interest on a ghost tale which merely describes how a ghost appeared and its appearance threw the spectators into a panic. This happened in Lovecraft's tale, *The Outsider,* but was a mere incident in the story; the author with consummate literary artistry made of the ululating ghoul who crept out of the tomb a character that will live in the memory when most other stories have faded into oblivion. But most of the ghost stories that flow to the editor's desk merely picture a wailing ghost, and have the people who see it fall into several kinds of terror merely because it *is* a ghost. That is trite, and the stories are returned to their authors. But when the ghosts talk and act like real people, and re-enact their crimes to the stunned horror of the spectator whom they (the ghosts) have lured to their cabin, as in *The Ghosts of Steamboat Coulee* by Lieutenant Burks, again you have a story that fascinates the reader.

Likewise we constantly receive sea-serpent stories in which the whole action consists in a fight between monsters of the deep, and panic among the ship's passengers who witness it—just that, and nothing else. Kipling took

this bare theme and made a thrilling tale out of it by the sheer power of genius, and it behooves other writers to keep off the theme unless they have something new to offer. Bassett Morgan made a real story out of the sea-serpent theme for WEIRD TALES when he wrote *Laocoon*, but he built up a new and wonderful plot around this time-worn subject.

Another theme popular with writers of weird tales is the one that Ambrose Bierce used in his *Mysterious Disappearances*, where he relates a number of instances of people stepping into "holes in space" and disappearing. We have received a number of manuscripts on this theme, but these have been sent back to their authors because there was really no story. To have a horde of Mohammedan warriors disappear into thin air in the year 1211 as they were about to storm a Spanish castle—that is interesting, and it *might* make a good story; but to have them reappear at the same place in this year of grace 1926 and continue the assault, as J. M. Hiatt has done for you in *The Assault Upon Miracle Castle;* or to have some being from ten thousand years in the future reach back into the present to seize his victims, as Edmond Hamilton has done for you in *The Time Raider*—that makes fascinating reading, such as may well find place in WEIRD TALES. Both tales (Hiatt's and Hamilton's) are based on the same idea that is used so often—the stepping off into another dimension, into the "holes in space"; but the authors have built up the idea into fascinating plots. Both stories will be published soon.

It is such imaginative treatment of threadbare themes that makes them new and living; it makes stories that are utterly different. And it is such stories that WEIRD TALES is always looking for; for the brilliant success of this magazine has been built on stories that are really unusual.

Writes J. Vernon Shea, Jr., of Pittsburgh: "It might be interesting to you to know that you have young readers as well as old. I am just a boy of thirteen, but I am of the opinion that WEIRD TALES is the best magazine ever published. Such writers as Eli Colter, Seabury Quinn, H. P. Lovecraft, Robert S. Carr and Edmond Hamilton deserve special mention for their excellent work. I can never forget *The Outsider*, by Lovecraft. It was the weirdest, most thrilling and most eery tale I have ever had the good fortune to read."

Writes Floyd Anderson, of Minneapolis: "I get more excitement out of reading WEIRD TALES than seeing an exciting movie. Last November, by chance, I purchased a copy, and since then have never missed a single issue."

Gordon Philip England writes from Quebec Province, Canada: "I think *The Demons of Castle Romnare* one of the very best ghost stories I ever had the fortune to read. To get the full power of the story one needs to read it aloud, and then it is just wonderful."

Writes Elizabeth Adt Wenzler, of Brooklyn: "*The Woman of the Wood* in the August issue was delicately beautiful; *The Monster-God of Mamurth* truly eery and different; *The Devil's Graveyard* very entertaining, with frights and shivers. An excellent number."

C. F. Chapman, of Los Angeles, writes: "I want to thank you for the introduction to your pages, in *The Woman of the Wood*, of those interesting wights the Dryads, or Annes Colie, as we Celts did and do call them. How much I wish your readers might enjoy the masterpieces of weird fiction by Fiona McLeod in the original Gaelic! These are not only weird and uncanny to a high degree, but are literary gems with which you are no doubt familiar. I refer particularly to the group published in translation (now out of print),

titled *The Washer of the Ford;* i. e., the Banshee. Would it be possible to publish a reprint of these wonderful tales, or rather such as are most suitable?"

Writes Rafael A. Saliva, from Mayaguez, Porto Rico: "In order to get the real thrill out of your stories, I usually read them in bed, when I am alone in my room. Anyone who reads these stories will find he can enjoy them much more, reading them by night, the later the better. The atmosphere itself lends itself to such wild roamings of the imagination."

Ralph Connor, of Vancouver Barracks, Washington, writes to The Eyrie: "I haven't missed an issue of WEIRD TALES for over a year. Why not some more *Duval's Weird Experiment* stories? We have had some, but crave more. And more of the type of *The Outsider*—that story haunts me yet. *A Runaway World* in the July issue was absolutely fascinating. It is not only weird but possible. Harris has voiced a theory as it might be—I half believe this theory possible."

Mrs. W. C. Hefferlin, of El Cerrito, California, writes to The Eyrie: "I have just finished rereading *The Moon-Bog,* by H. P. Lovecraft, and *The Woman of the Wood,* by A. Merritt. I want to express my appreciation of those two beautiful tales. 'Beautiful' is the only word which describes them. Poe had absolutely 'nothing on' Lovecraft for weirdness. Only in Poe's poems does one find the beauty which H. P. Lovecraft and A. Merritt put into their stories."

Well, readers, *The Woman of the Wood,* by A. Merritt, easily won first place in your voting for favorite story in the August issue. *The Monster-God of Mamurth,* by Edmond Hamilton, and *The Devil's Graveyard,* by G. G. Pendarves, were second and third choice. What story do you like best in the present issue? And if there are any stories you do *not* like, be sure to let us know; for it is only by hearing from you that we are able to keep WEIRD TALES up to the standard that you desire.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE OCTOBER WEIRD TALES ARE:

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The Supreme Witch

(Continued from page 448)

through and through me . . . Nora, dead these six-and-fifty years!"

He flung down his hand, raising his chin.

"There then," said he, "is my answer to you gentlemen who are so mighty scornful of witchcraft. Why Nora changed not into a bird or moth to escape me, why she spelled me not blind or cripple, I can not say. But in what she did, showed she not the supremest witchcraft that could be? She changed the sky, she threw back the year to thirteen years before; and while we in the passage were but half under her magic, which was enough for her, she so spell-bound Ralph Timmins and Drew, the turnkey, that without ado they hanged her from the beam in the cell, believing they were hanging her mother . . . I made no endeavor afterwards to punish these fellows. Think you I would have spared them if the circumstances were not as I have told you?"

OF THE listeners it was the parson who spoke. The hints of great sorrow which had come from Old Jem had not been without effect on him. So that, hateful though the picture of his host in early manhood was, he was no longer void of pity.

"Mr. Lambardiston," he said, and his tones were gentle, "I hold your story of this awful happening to be true in every word—so far as that happening was understood by you and others. But I deem you have erred as to the real nature of it . . . I can not believe it was any witchcraft of Nora Shafto that took her from you."

"Could aught save witchcraft have done it?" exclaimed Old Jem with rising anger.

"Yes," answered the parson. For

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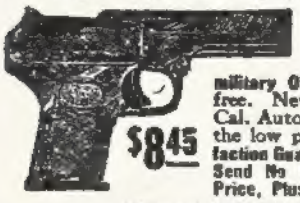

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a moment he was silent, then: "Mr. Lambardiston, this is to be a reply to your question, 'Could aught?' 'Tis no attempt to interpret—I would not dare so to interpret—the happening . . . Of poor little Nora Shafto you have used the word 'supreme.' Bethink you, is not that word often given to a Veritable Power far asunder from witchcraft? The Supreme Power which stayed the sun upon Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon, which thrust back the shadow on the sundial, could with equal ease have transmuted the years for you that were in the jail—decreeing that thus should Nora, who, for all her childish vauntings of witchcraft, was truly 'white-souled as an angel'——" The speaker paused. "Decreeing that thus should Nora go to her mother," he ended mercifully.

For the color had ebbed from Old Jem's cheeks, the very purple of his lips was mud-hue, and consternation and growing despair were in his face.

"I had not thought of that!" said the old man whisperingly. "If that should be the right answer to all of it, Parson!" Then a new expression crossed his face, and during an instant his voice was firmer. "For Nora's sake I hope it is, for that means heaven for her! . . . But if it *is* the answer, Parson—*what is going to become of me?*"

"I believe such things as that hope for Nora's sake do make some little plea for us," said the parson quietly. "Also——"

The courtly king's messenger nudged the scrivener with his knee. The two got up and lit their pipes at the far end of the room, noting that the parson left his chair and took one beside Old Jem.

And not until they perceived these two clinch some matter with a long handclasp, did the smokers go back to the table.

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